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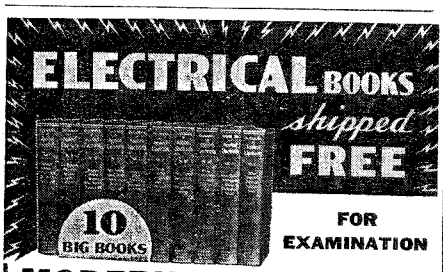

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ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 309 CONTENTS AUGUST 9, 1941 Number 6

Looking Ahead!

TOWN MARSHAL

Mr. Jeff Kettle, ex-badman of Texas, is now administering the law for Hackberry, which has retired its last two marshals to Boothill. He's sitting in on this hand with a mighty small pair of deuces; but then he's used to making his own aces—out of lead. Shot-by-shot returns on the game make an exciting new two-part novel by

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KID FELONY

Sonny dreamed of being a champ at twenty; and then woke up in jail, with the cops snarling questions and calling him momma's boy. Which merely went to show that the cops didn't understand the family they were dealing with. A knockout short novelet with the fighting outside the ring, by

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THE BLACKEST NIGHT

London today . . . with air-raid sirens screaming and bombs plunging out of the sky. And below ground three Americans fighting a strange and devious battle for the safety of the Empire . . . fighting until a Seminole Indian lifts his victory cry. An exciting novelet of sabotage on two continents, by

WILLIAM DU BOIS

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Coming in next week's Argosy—August 16

RUN, TIGER!—*Short Novel* . . . . . Donald Barr Chidsey 6

On the jungle border of Kammorirri an ancient calliope is wheezing out a fantastic battle tune; and Prince Mike must claim the allegiance of a couple of circus performers and a bewildered monkey

PEANUTS TO YOU—*Short Story* . . . . . William R. Cox 23

Presenting Bubber Holt, the ball player with the brains and speed and figure of a beer barrel. Watch him roll to glory!

MEN OF DARING—*True Story in Pictures* . . . . . Stookie Allen 28

Charles H. Veil—Fun, Fighting, and Famine

NO SPURS, NO GUN—*Short Story* . . . . . George Michener 30

"You've got good hands, boy," the gunman had said. But David didn't know how good . . . until he'd had to use them

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. . . . . Murray R. Montgomery 36

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BUT OUR HERO WAS NOT DEAD—*Short Short Story*
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Of course he was not dead—and never will be. Any Englishman can tell you that

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

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Run, Tiger!

I heard the Chinks screech at something that came out of the forest; and then the whole world seemed to explode

By Donald Barr Chidsey

Author of "All the King's Jewels," "The Queen's Henchmen," etc.

Extraordinary Asiatic engagement! Joseph, the wistful tiger; Racketty-Rax, the temperamental knife-thrower; and other stellar attractions will entertain a group of selected cutthroats. But His Highness Prince Mike of Kammorirri will stop the show with a command appearance of Hiccup, the fire-eating monkey

CHAPTER I

THE GHASTLY CLOWN

MIKE brought it down as neatly as you'd put a book on a table. He had the *hands,* as horsemen and yachtsmen say. The place he regularly landed in and took off from, back in the palace, was a mere courtyard; anybody else would have been killed long ago. And now here near the Chinese border he let the little silver monoplane come to earth among such a clutter of tree stumps that you wouldn't have supposed you could ride a bicycle there.

The bearer was scared stiff; but then he wasn't used to it. He was a native with a name that sounded like Evvy, which is what we might as well call him. Like all Kammorirrians, he simply adored Mike; but even so, you could see that he was a good bit happier when he scrambled out.

I don't believe there are any bandits," said Mike.

I said, "Well, if they're in the jungle we wouldn't be able to see 'em from up there anyway."

"That's true. We couldn't even see the village."

He was restless. He had been a good boy for a long while, ruling Kammorirri in the name of his father, the old Sultan, who seldom showed his face in public; and he was bored. He wanted excitement.

We hadn't jumped into the plane for a little vacation to Bangkok or Hanoi for quite a while now—hadn't had a chance. Nor had we done any hunting. Mike had been busy being the crown prince, practically the regent, and I'd been busy being secretary of war, commander-in-chief of the army, and police commissioner.

"I don't believe there are any bandits," Mike said again. "Let's go up to the village. We're perfectly safe leaving the plane here. The boys will find it. We might be able to knock over a leopard or something later."

"Remember," I said cautiously, "I'm responsible for your life."

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"Oh, hell," he said. "Come on."

I didn't believe there were any bandits in Kammorirri either, for that matter. But in a part of the world as remote as that—we were somewhere near the place where Siam, Tonkin, Laos, the Shan States, and southwestern China more or less bump into one another, if that helps you—I figured it was just as well to play safe.

It was true that Chiang Kai-shek was being nasty to the bandits who looked for pickings along the road between Hsia-Kwan and the Burmese border, and that he might have scared them into working a little further south, toward or even over the Kammorirrian border. We'd heard a report, in fact, that this had happened.

It was not a very reliable report. It had come from a wildly excited kid who had appeared a few days ago at the palace babbling something about his village having been attacked by Lolos. It didn't make much sense. Apparently he had not actually witnessed the attack, only heard it from a distance. But anyway, I decided to investigate.

Mike came along, or rather brought me along in his plane, just for the change and because he thought we might get a chance to bag a gaur or even an elephant.

The army was proceeding to this border on foot, just in case. Not the whole army, but thirty picked members of it, my favorites, crack troops I had worked on very hard. They had started the day before, and they ought to reach the edge of the teak forest the day after we did. The

Complete Short Novel

mountain trails were terrific, but those babies knew how to take them.

Their orders were to search for Mike's plane—everybody knew that little silver job, the only one allowed to fly over Kammorirri—which would be left somewhere near the edge of the forest.

The edge of that forest practically marked the Chinese-Kammorirrian border. The forest had been a lot bigger until some years ago when the Governor of Yunnan had given a concession to some teak company which had gone to work cutting down every tree in sight.

They'd built a corduroy road to connect with an artery of the famous Burma Road, and then they had proceeded to cut their way right across the Kammorirrian border—or at least where the Kammorirrian border was supposed to be, this never having been settled very definitely.

The Sultan had heard about it and raised hell. The Sultan, a testy old party, who never did care for the blessings of civilization, had told the governor of Yunnan Province to recall his concessionaires. The governor had responded by suggesting that a joint commission be appointed to study the situation and to determine the exact location of the boundary—meanwhile letting the concessionaires chop all they pleased.

The Sultan had not even answered this suggestion—in

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writing. Instead he had sent down part of his army—this was before I commanded it—and kicked the concessionaires out.

The governor had squawked, declaring himself to be insulted, but hadn't done anything else. After all, Kammorirri would be a tough country to invade, being all mountains and deathlike jungle, and the Kammorirrian hillbillies were about as ungentle and inhospitable a pack of savages as you were likely to meet anywhere in the world; in addition to which the Sultan himself was the kind of general who never understood when he was licked; and besides, China had a war of her own starting, with Japan, and she couldn't afford to get into any more trouble.

So the destruction stopped right then and there, the concessionaires, poked in the buttocks by spears, scampering away and leaving hundreds of acres of stumps and the remains of the corduroy road. After which the edge of the teak forest had been accepted as more or less marking the international boundary.

WELL, we had plenty of provisions, and I was in favor of sticking by the plane until the army came. But Mike wanted to go on to the village. "We ought to find a path somewhere," he said.

We did—and it led us spang into the tiger.

There were four of us. There was his Royal Highness Mikuud-Phni Luangba of Kammorirri, which is to say Mike himself, a Princeton graduate but as swell a little guy as you'd ever meet; and me; and Evvy; and finally there was the stowaway, a pest and nuisance of a monkey named Hiccup.

Monkeys are common in Kammorirri, where ordinarily you wouldn't dream of making a pet of one. Hiccup however had walked right into the palace one afternoon and attached himself to Mike, and after that there was no getting rid of him.

Like so many monkeys, he was a born showoff. He was smart too; but you could never figure out *how* smart. I had taught him to play *Yankee Doodle,* the song I used to drill the palace guard to, on an old harmonium; and Mike was trying to teach him bridge, contending that he'd at least be an improvement on me.

On the other hand, just when you'd come to the conclusion that he had more and better brains than most humans, he would turn around and do something so dumb that you began to believe that even among monkeys he must be a halfwit.

He was usually good company, though; too much of it. He hated to be left out of anything. He had no business coming on this little jaunt at all, but by the time we'd discovered him, gravely seated in the washroom of Mike's plane, we were too far on our way to put back.

Evvy plugged along far behind, bent under the guns, while Hiccup was mostly above or ahead, though sometimes he fell back long enough to perch on Mike's shoulder for a little while. When he fell back it was probably because he'd run into some other monkeys up there. Hiccup like human beings, but he did not care to play around with his own kind. They were too rough.

Anyway Hiccup was on Mike's shoulder when we ran into the tiger.

A teak forest isn't like an ordinary forest. I called this a jungle, a little while ago, but that isn't right. Most of Kammorirri is jungle, but this part isn't. The trees were tall and straight, and the leaves were large and smooth but they didn't block out the sky the way leaves in a jungle do. There was very little undergrowth. It was almost like walking through a park.

However, this happened to be a particularly dark morning, and when we turned a curve in the path we found ourselves within a few feet of the tiger.

It was a big one, too. A male. Facing us.

IT MUST have startled the tiger as much as it startled us. It didn't startle Evvy, but only because he didn't see what was going on. He was a good gun boy and would have stuck close to us if we had expected to come upon anything, but right now he was far in the rear.

Mike half turned; then realizing that Evvy was out of sight, he stood stock-still except that he swiveled his eyes in my direction.

I knew what he was thinking. He wasn't scared. Mike had killed too many tigers to be scared of them. But he knew, as I knew, that this one might get panicky at finding itself so close to men; and when a tiger is panicky it's likely to do almost anything.

Mike didn't have any gun, not even a pistol. I had my revolver, a big S. and W. Magnum, heavy and very strong. I slid this out.

When the tiger saw the gun it didn't turn and run, nor did it crouch to spring. Instead—*it sat up on its hind legs!*

I never got such a shock in my life. It's a wonder I didn't let fly out of sheer surprise. But I lowered the gun, and the tiger, looking disappointed, dropped to all fours. I saw now that while it was a big beast, it was old. It had a weary, sagging look.

Mike started, "Well, if anybody can explain what—"

And then a pipe organ began to play, about a hundred yards ahead. Well, not a pipe organ; it sounded more like an old-fashioned steam calliope in a circus or on a merry-go-round. *Boop-boop-boop!* It was terrible, and very loud. It was playing *Hearts and Flowers* mercilessly.

Before we had a chance to catch our breath a man came running down the path past the tiger and fell flat on his face in front of us.

He must have measured seven feet from the top of his head, on which was tilted a pearl gray derby, to the bottom of his feet, which were encased in moccasins made of silver sequins; and he couldn't have weighed more than ninety pounds. He wore a pink-and-white striped silk shirt, a celluloid collar, a white washable but not washed necktie, a glass stickpin the size of a marble.

His shirttails hung around his hips, he was so tall. His legs were thrust into purple cotton tights, old and faded, ripped and sewed in many places, with giddy silver tassels above the knees. You could have looped thumb and forefinger around the upper part of either of his legs, he was so skinny.

When he sprawled at our feet his derby fell off; and five glass balls—blue, purple, green, yellow, red—rolled out.

He groaned a little, but did not move after that. Mike and I knelt beside him. Mike turned him over and tipped back his head. His eyes were open, but he wasn't seeing anything. There was terror, stark terror, in those eyes. Or there had been. The expression was frozen there. But the man wasn't feeling that terror any more, being dead.

Terror is a quiet word for describing what *we* felt, Mike and I, when we saw this man's face.

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For his lips were great swollen purple blobs, crusted with dried blood and not backed by teeth. His nose was only an out-jutting of bone, a smear of soggy flesh, no skin at all. Red wet wounds were what marked the places where his ears should have been.

IT WAS the shock that must have been the cause of me being so slow to think, when the action came. The chief law-enforcement officer of an Asiatic Switzerland like Kammorirri gets used to strange sights, and I had begun to think that nothing could make the Marline blood run cold again; but this did.

In the first place I hadn't supposed that there was another white man within hundreds of miles of me. In the second place I simply wasn't accustomed to witnessing the deaths of seven-foot skeletons in purple tights and with glass balls in their derbies, guys whose noses and ears had been sliced off, while a tiger sat up and begged and a pipe organ somewhere played *Hearts and Flowers*.

It may sound funny; but it wasn't funny. He had died, remember, with horror in his eyes. The face was stiff with agony, the limbs taut with pain endured.

Then the command came, clear and harsh and loud, right in front of me. The words were not familiar, but I couldn't help understanding them. I had heard that command in too many languages not to knew what it meant.

I should have straightened up shooting, shooting from the hip, and we might have had a chance. But probably not. Probably that would just have meant that we'd be killed then and there.

As it was, I had stuck my revolver back into its holster as I knelt beside the gruesome corpse, just to get it out of the way; and when I straightened up I slapped my hand over it and even got it half out; but I didn't have a chance to raise it. Which as I say, was probably just as well.

One guy, facing us at a distance of maybe ten yards, had an automatic rifle at his shoulder, and he let this splutter. Fortunately he was the world's worst shot, so that while the air between Mike and me got all whiney with lead for a split second there, neither of us was actually touched.

But there was another guy, squat and square and thickly Mongolian, who held an automatic pistol, and *he* knew what he was doing. He fired three times at my feet, so that dirt sprang up in little brown spear-heads. He shouted something. And it was clear from his manner that if he had to fire a fourth shot it would go right through my heart.

I stopped as if I were paralyzed. Coldy the squat efficient Chink, without looking at him, spoke to the man at his side, who did not lower his rifle. Then he said something to me.

"He says," interpreted Mike, who knew at least a little bit of practically every language on earth, "that you should take your hand off your pistol, Georgie. And I think you had better obey."

Well, I thought so too. And that's the way they got us.

CHAPTER II

HEARTS AND FLOWERS

THERE were some twenty-five or thirty of them, as I saw in a little while when they began drifting toward us from all directions. Three or four had on uniforms, but these were so faded and torn that we couldn't make out what nation they'd once represented; probably these guys were deserters from one of Chiang Kai-shek's armies.

Most of the men wore any old sort of rags. They were all armed, some with small flat swords, but all of them with daggers and with either a pistol or rifle, usually a rifle. I suppose they were picturesque, but you couldn't call them easy on the eyes, or on the nerves either.

Some were Lolos, or part Lolos, aboriginal hill tribesmen from Yunnan, while others were Chinese of one sort or another. They slouched, scowling; and they looked all brute. There was nothing about them of the backward but upright Kammorirrian, though there were a few that might have been part Annamite or part Tonkinese, and there was one who certainly had a lot of white blood.

Taking it all in all, they were a tough-looking bunch. Rapists and thieves, these men. Fugitives, butchers, they were ignorant, stupid, avaricious, without conscience.

They didn't seem to have a chief, and they all did pretty much as they pleased. The one we saw most of was the half-white one, and this was because he alone spoke a little pidgin English. The others all spoke some dialect even Mike had trouble getting.

To the tune of *Hearts and Flowers*, now being played for the fifth time, they took us to their camp. And there our breath was sucked away again.

In a clearing were four Model T Ford trucks, arranged in a circle. They were painted yellow and orange and red mostly, though there were streaks and whorls of violets, magenta, Nile green, and indigo, and the Chinese and Siamese characters and the Malayan and English lettering with which they were bespattered were in black and gilt.

The English words on the two closed trucks were MOMMSEN'S CELEBRATED SPECTACLE; the letters, like the rest of the paint, being dim and old. Another truck was, sure enough, a steam calliope. It was very old and wheezy, and badly out of tune, and the woman who sat at it, besides being the fattest woman I'd ever seen, was also the worst musician.

"Oh, Gawd!" she cried, when she saw us. "They got some more!"

A bandit swished out his sword and laid the flat of it across her shouders with a *thwank* you coud have heard a mile away. She didn't wince; just gave him a dirty look and kept right on playing *Hearts and Flowers*. We later learned that when the bandits felt like hearing her play, which was often, they felt like hours of it. They always kept pokers in the charcoal fire which generated the steam, and any time Fatty began to slacken her pace, they would jab her with one of these.

The fourth truck was an animal cage. That's where they put us.

THEY were rough and brusque with us, which I didn't care so much about as far as I was concerned, but it made me sore to see them act that way with Mike. Mike is such a little guy—in spite of the fact that he's dynamite with his fists—that you can't help having a sort of protective feeling about him. I guess I liked the guy more than I realized. Anyway when one of the bandits gave him a push toward the cage, I flared.

"Who the hell do you think you're shoving there, bozo?" As if they could understand. But when you're sore you don't stop to reason out things like that. "Don't you know that's Prince—"

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Mike himself cut me short with a look. Mike was, after all, born of a long line of ruling princes, and when he wanted to he could turn on a look that was as definite as a hand clapped over your mouth.

I saw what he meant. If they caught the name Mikuud-Phni Luangba they might recognize it, even the way I pronounced it; then there was no telling what might happen. It was pretty well known that Mike was the apple of his old man's eye. The only son who had been permitted to leave Kamorirri, he had been educated in the States and had been trained to succeed his father.

The Sultan would go on the warpath surer than hell if Mike was hurt. On the other hand, he would certainly pay an enormous ransom for Mike's return. For the Sultan happened to be one of the richest men in the world.

All this the bandits would know; and if they learned who Mike was they might get panicky, kill him and run away. After all, they weren't so much real men as beasts. If they didn't do that, they'd at least hold him for some stupendously high ransom—and when they got it, kill him anyway. He was too important a personage for them to fool with. So it was better for us if they didn't know who he was.

The cage was divided into two parts, though the gate between them was open; and it stank even worse than most animal cages do. And there were already other occupants.

They looked at us, and we looked at them.

Addison L. Mommsen was a very big man, though not as big as his wife, the fat woman who was playing *Hearts and Flowers* outside. He was soft and sad and at all times covered with a smooth unglittering sheen of sweat. His face was pale and marked with purple lines. His yellow silk shirt was plastered to his torso here and there, and there were half moons of sweat under his arms.

What hair he had was so yellow it was almost white, and very thin. His eyes were perfectly round, poppy, china blue, and held a hurt expression. He always seemed to be pouting.

Racketty-Rax (the only name I ever knew him by) looked like an extremely hard-boiled street-corner sport in miniature. Though he wasn't hunchbacked or deformed in any way, he couldn't have been more than three feet tall. He made up for this, or tried to, by scowling and snarling and talking out of a corner of his mouth. He was determined to show the world that it had better not get fresh with *him*.

When Mike and I entered the cage Racketty-Rax was doing cartwheels up on side of it and back the other: slow deliberate cartwheels that I've got to admit were graceful. He stopped a moment, fisting his hips, to glare at us. Then he snorted in disgust, and fell to doing backflips.

The third captive was Bertina Howland. A brunette with a swift grin and highly intelligent eyes, maybe twenty-two or -three years old, she sat at a typewriter resting on a small folding table.

"Come in, victims, come in! Everything's copy for Bertina! This will be a swell story if I ever live to sell it. Come in!"

MIKE made a bow and introduced me, and introduced himself as Mike Lang, a name he sometimes uses when traveling incog. He told what had happened. Mommsen mopped his face with a handkerchief and shook his head. Bertina Howland made a note. Racketty-Rax went on doing backflips.

"Poor Ralston!" Mommsen said. "I guess they tortured him so his heart gave out." He looked at us and explained. "He used to do a sort of tumbling act with Racketty-Rax here, and they were clowns, and Ralston could juggle too with some glass balls he used to keep keep in his hat. We all have to do different jobs, because of course there aren't many of us left."

"Ralston was a swell guy," muttered Racketty-Rax, glaring at us as if he held us responsible.

"He used to sell tickets too, while I did my spiel," Mommsen went on. "That's why he used to be dressed-up above the waist, which was the only part that showed at the window. When it came time for him to go into his act, all he had to do was take off his collar and tie and shirt."

"Well, that's three," Bertina Howland said. "I wonder who's going next?"

"Not you, anyway," Mommsen said gloomily.

She explained: "You see, I'd heard about Mommsen's Celebrated Spectacle while I was riding the Burma Road between Lashio and the border. It's pretty famous in those parts."

"Been in Asia seventeen years," Mommsen said.

"I wanted to catch up with it and get a story. I'm a free-lance correspondent. But it seems that Mr. Mommsen here decided not to stick to the Burma Road. The Japs were bombing it too much."

"Can you blame me? It'll all right for *you!* You're just itching for excitement. But I'm not any adventurer. I'm a businessman."

"So he turned off into some no-acount road that doesn't even have a name, and I heard about this and turned off after him, and I'd just managed to pass him and get to the head of the caravan to stop him—when along came our boy friends!"

The music, if you should call it that, stopped; and there was a long high horrible shriek; and then the music started up again, faster than ever.

Mommsen looked as if he was about to burst into tears.

"They're torturing Gladys again, the dirty bums," he muttered. "She saw what they did to Ralston when he refused to perform any more, so she's scared to stop. I don't blame her."

Mike managed to put a lot of softness and sympathy into his voice as he asked, "Doesn't she know any other selections?"

"Oh, sure. She can play *Marching Through Georgia* and *Abide With Me,* but I guess she's tired of them. She played them practically all day yesterday."

I was hoping that they wouldn't insist that I play my one number, *Yankee Doodle,* with a single finger. That was the number I had taught Hiccup to play on the harmonium. In fact I'd made it familiar around the palace, where everybody associated it with me, particularly the soldiers, because I used to drill them to the tune of it.

I WONDERED what had happened to Hiccup. I looked around but didn't see him. I wondered if there was any chance that he would find his way back to the palace, which would certainly give the alarm just like an old-time cowhand's pony coming back to the ranch house with an empty saddle. But I decided that Hiccup wouldn't. He'd stick around.

"It was terrible the way they treated Mr. Ralston," the girl said. Her large brown eyes were kind of swollen, the pupils very large, in a way that would only be caused by

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dope or extreme fear; and I knew that in this case it was fear, though she was determined not to let it show. "They got Racketty-Rax here to throw knives at him."

The dwarf had ceased backflipping. He must have been in good shape. He was scarcely breathing hard.

"I never hit him with one," he retorted. "I'm getting good."

"Racketty-Rax throws knives, and the highwaymen found that out," Mommsen said sadly. "We've all got to do various things in a troupe like this. But he's just learning."

"I never hit him," Racketty-Rax repeated. "I was scared that I would. There are some guys I wouldn't mind throwing knives at and maybe my hand would slip. But not Ralston. I tried to miss him by a lot, to keep him from getting scared, but they wouldn't let me."

"They liked that act," Mommsen said thoughtfully. "I must use it, if we ever get out of this alive. Only Racketty-Rax needs more practice; and of course we've got to get somebody to take Ralson's place."

"They'll probably think of something else they want done pretty soon," Racketty-Rax predicted gloomily. "They must be getting tired of hearing Gladys play."

"They're like kids; they can stand the same thing over and over again, for hours on end, and love it."

I was thinking also, as I know Mike was, about Evvy the gun-bearer. I figured there was a chance that he had seen what was happening to us, and had turned and run back toward the palace. It was a long distance to go, to the palace, but he would be almost certain on the way to run into the guardsmen I'd ordered to meet us at the edge of the forest.

If *those* babies learned that Mike and I were in trouble, then there *would* be hell to pay! I'd never had them in any real battle, but I think I'd trained them pretty well, and they had just lately been equipped with all sorts of modern weapons. They didn't need to be taught how to fight, though. They were natural-born fighters. All Kammorirrians are.

Well, just when I was thinking about this, and gazing between the bars of the cage, I saw a bandit come into the center of the clearing and throw down Mike's green canvas gun bags. A second later the whole pack was there, chattering, gesticulating.

I didn't get distressed about Evvy, even then. I figured that, seeing the bandits, and seeing that he couldn't possibly be of any help to us by staying, he had simply dropped the guns and run. That would have been the sensible thing to do.

But when I glanced at Mike I knew that he felt like hell. Those were beautiful guns he had; no stock models but all specially made and fitted: lovely sure shiny things, much too good for the yellow mongrels that were pawing them now.

Hearts and Flowers stopped abruptly, the bandits apparently getting sick of it themselves; and a few minutes later the cage was opened to Gladys Mommsen, who must have weighed four hundred pounds, and she was hurled inside.

She looked balefully at Mike and me.

"They kill Ralston?"

Mike said quietly, sympathetically, "Yes."

"Damn' shame," Gladys said. "He was a regular guy. Best guy in this outfit, anyway. Not that that's saying much."

She did not even glance at her perspiring husband. She went to a corner there was no furniture of any kind in the cage—and crashed carelessly to the floor.

"Gawd! Am I worn out!" Half a minuter later she was snoring.

CHAPTER III

COMMAND EXPERIENCE

"I DON'T quite understand," said Mike, partly out of politeness, partly because he was eager to talk about something else, to get his mind off those guns, "how you ever got *here*."

They fell all over themselves answering this. It seems that Mommsen with his circus had been roaming these parts for seventeen years, and making a fairly good thing of it; but he naturally stuck to the seaports, the interior of China being neither comfortable nor very safe, and certainly no place to make money.

But the Sino-Japanese war had reduced his troupe and had driven him inland. He wouldn't leave Asia. "I wouldn't know how to run a show anywhere else, I've been at it here so long," he wailed.

How he ever got permission to travel the Burma Road in the first place, I don't know. The Chinese at one end and the British at the other are super-fussy about this thoroughfare, and the Japs are very interested in it.

Bertina Howland was different. You can never keep an American newspaperman or newspaperwoman out of any place he wants to go anyway, and Bertina happened to be a daughter of U. S. Senator Howland, which made a lot of difference even in deepest Yunnan. But how Mommsen and his forlorn little carnival had ever crashed the gate I don't know.

The brigands probably wouldn't have dared to attack them right on the Burma Road itself, but the side road looked safe enough. Ordinarily the brigands would rob them and beat them, maybe kill them, and then romp away.

But the circus trucks dazzled them. They had never before seen anything like these giddy gaudy vehicles, and they must have thought, if they thought at all, that Bertina Howland was some Burmese or Indian princess, and that the trucks were her bodyguard.

"So then they decided to take the whole lot of us along."

"That probably saved your lives," Mike pointed out.

"Well, we're not dead yet, anyway. But still . . . It used to be a bigger troupe. We had Jake, who was a kind of man-of-all-works. He was a half-caste. They shot him down before he had a chance to open his trap.

"Then there was Clancy Long, who used to do the act with the animals; he socked one of the beggars and then ran. They shot after him, and pretty soon he began to limp. They shot after him again, and he pitched forward on his face. Then they ran up to where he was lying, and we could see them slug him with the butts of their rifles. They slugged him for a long while. He couldn't possibly have been alive when they finally left him."

Hope stirred faintly inside of me.

"Did they leave him there, then?"

"Yes, but I don't think he'll ever be found. It was just wasteland, no villages. And very little travel. The peasants would naturally be afraid to squeal on these guys, and even if any soldiers should happen to pass that way they wouldn't be likely to notice Clancy Long."

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"The other guy? Jake?"

"They hauled him over there too, by his heels, and left him right next to Clancy Long."

Mike wasn't paying any attention now, and I looked over and saw that he was talking to a monkey that had slipped in between a couple of bars. It was Hiccup!

Mike was talking to him in a low voice, while Hiccup, with his shoebutton eyes, was staring earnestly up into his face. Mike was pointing to the highwayman who was supposed to be guarding us but who as a matter of fact was sound asleep against a tree. Mike would point to his own left-hand pants pocket, knowing that the guard had the cage key in *his* left-hand pocket, and he'd make motions about taking something out. Hiccup was trying to get the idea.

"Clancy Long was a pretty good cat man too," Mommsen went on. He got sadder and sadder as he talked. "We used to have three lions and a couple of tigers, but the bandits didn't want them hanging around, so they opened the cage and shooed them away. All except one of the tigers, the he-one, Joseph.

"They wanted the cage for us, I guess. But Joseph wouldn't go. He'd been with me ever since he was a cub, tamest tiger I ever knew, and I guess he couldn't face the thought of living anywhere else. He hung around, day after day, following us. They used to shoot at him, but still he'd slink along. I shouldn't be surprised if he was hanging around somewhere right now."

I asked, "Does Joesph beg when he sees a revolver?"

"Yes. Clancy Long taught him that. It was only a prop pistol he used to use; it wouldn't shoot. But Joesph would sit up."

"Well then, Joseph's still out there."

MIKE pointed again to the sleeping guard, and Hiccup, nodding, slipped outside. Nobody there noticed him, monkeys being common in those parts. At first the bandits had been coming up to the cage to take a better look at us every now and then; sometimes they would even chuck stones in, to make us sore. But they'd given this up. Hiccup had a clear field.

While we all watched, the monk walked to the sleeping guard. He stood in front of the guard in a comical attitude, human as all get out, his right elbow in the palm of his left hand, his right hand at his chin, thumb and forefinger V-ed across the mouth. After a while, having studied the situation, he hopped closer to the guy and reached a tiny nervous efficient paw into the right pants pocket.

The *right* pocket, not the left one! Mike tried to signal to him, but Hiccup was intent upon his theft.

Pretty soon he drew the paw out. The guard never stirred.

There was a revolver in the paw!

Hiccup was proud of this, and decided to play with it for a while. No doubt he had noticed how human beings held revolvers. Monkey see, monkey do, as the saying is. But Hiccup wasn't strong enough to get far with this one. He was soon reduced to using both hands, one on the butt, one over the trigger, which he began to pull. He swung the barrel around until the muzzle was pointing right at the cage. That muzzle wobbled back and forth, up and down.

Well, what would you do in those circumstances? That's what we did: we fell flat on our faces. There wasn't any furniture in the cage, the walls of which were simply bars.

Most of the others were afraid to even look, but I rolled my head sufficiently to free one eye. I just had to look.

That gun must have had a very stiff action. Hiccup wasn't strong, and as he'd pull the trigger, ambitious, the hammer would go back; but he couldn't get it to go all the way. Time and again he tried, while the muzzle wobbled. Time and again he had to relax his grip. After a while he put the gun down, discouraged.

Now Mike signaled him again. Hiccup was eager to please! He was like a mutt trying to make a home for himself, ready to do any stunt if he could only get the idea. Mike was signaling the left pocket, but Hiccup never seemed to get that at all. Once he thought he had it and he picked up the revolver again—whereupon there was once more a general pressing of noses to the floor.

Mike however kept signaling. He wanted Hiccup, if he didn't have sense enough to get the key, at least to bring us the revolver. A revolver wasn't likely to get us out of the cage; but it might help; it would be better than nothing.

Hiccup nodded with an expression uncannily human. He seemed to know, now exactly what Mike meant and to be trying to say how sorry he was that it had taken him all this time to catch on. Why, certainly! Anything to oblige! He lifted the gun again, this time really putting all his strength into the pull, and the thing went off.

THE bullet clacked against a bar and riccocheted around the cage, not hitting anybody, as we all fell flat again. The guard woke up with a jump; bandits came running from all directions; and Hiccup, knocked flat on his back, scrambled to a tree and disappeared in the general direction of the sky.

The bandits were never able to understand that affair. They hadn't see Hiccup; and the guard, to cover himself, jabbered something that was probably to the effect that somebody had attacked him from behind. There was a general search of the neighborhood, and a second search of us, too, the brigands coming into the cage and going over us carefully if not too gently.

It made me furious to see the way they handled Bertina Howland; but when I started to step forward to clout them she spoke up. "You'd only get us all killed," she said, which might have been true.

Because they figured that she was the leader of the party, the princess or maharanee or what-have-you, they wouldn't be likely to hurt her: they'd figure she represented a big ransom as soon as things cooled off and they could go back to some town and make inquiries and find out how to get in touch with her people.

On the other hand, they'd slaughter any or all of the rest of us with no more squeamishness than you'd feel at stepping on an ant.

"I guess nothing else but an old Model T Ford could have made it, or an oxcart," Mommsen went on. "Miss Howland's car couldn't. Too low-slung. So they rolled it off to one side and blew it to pieces. What they were afraid of, of course, was airplanes. I guess they made for this place because it was the only cover.

"They took us over a corduroy road, and then when we couldn't drive any further, when even the corduroy road gave out, they made us push the trucks by hand until we got here among these trees. We must be quite a way from the Burma Road?"

"You're over the Kammorirri border," Mike said.

"Good Lord! Out of the frying pan into the fire! I

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hear the old Sultan's the nastiest old barbarian in all Asia!"

"Oh, he's not so bad when you get to know him," said his son.

Bertina Howland, trying to sound casual, asked, "Have you got anybody you're expecting here, Mr. Lang? I mean, is anybody likely to guess what's happened to you?"

"There's only one possibility," Mike said.

"There's not that, any more," I said, and pointed to one of the bandits who had just come back to the clearing. This bandit was wearing a red Javanese sash. It was the same sash Evvy had been wearing, a thing he was very fond of. Mike himself had given Evvy that sash, and the boy never would have surrendered it except with his life.

As if to choke off any possible hope we might still have, the man with the sash swaggered over to the cage. He called out something in his own language, in a contemptuous voice, and took something out of his tunic and tossed it between the bars.

The thing landed with a soggy plop on the floor.

We tried not to look at it. Evvy the gun carrier had had a little brass ring, a snake eating its tail, an article he valued as highly as he had valued the scarf, and for the same reason—because Mikuud-Phni Luangba had given it to him.

They had taken this ring: you could see the red indentation, you could see where the skin had been torn. Impatient, no doubt, when the ring wouldn't come right away, they had hacked off the whole hand and worked it loose on the way back to camp. The wet and bleeding thing on the floor was the hand.

After a while I went over and picked it up and slung it back out through the bars. I'll never forget the feeling of it between my thumb and forefinger.

Mike was looking at the ceiling.

"Something tells me," he said quietly, "that if I ever get out of this place I'll find something better to shoot at than tigers."

IT HAD been eight in the morning when we were captured, and the Chinks did nothing about feeding us. That cage certainly did stink. And the other occupants were all more or less at sword's points; they'd been in the cage continuously for five or six days!

I talked with Mommsen for a while, and he told me some of his experiences running an American circus in the Orient, which would have been interesting if he hadn't felt so sorry for himself all the time.

After a while I did what I had really wanted to do, and moved over and talked with Bertina Howland. It did my heart good: not only because she was such a swell-looking girl, and so smart and everything, but also because she was a real American.

Mommsen and his wife and Racketty-Rax were American too, but that wasn't the same. They talked a special dialect of their own. But Bertina was the straight stuff. Remember, I'd been in Kammorirri for more than two years, and I got lonesome. Very seldom did I get a chance to go to some nearby city like Bangkok or Mandalay where I'd hear a little English—not American, you understand! But even English was welcome.

Listening to Bertina was kind of like listening to music when you haven't heard any in a long while. I didn't so much care what she said: it was the way she said it. She told me about the different experiences she'd had in the Orient, because she was bughouse about experiences and believed that the more of them she had the better she would be able to write. She wanted to write not only newspaper articles and articles for the magazines, but also books. She was very ambitious.

She asked me if I had lived in this part of the world very long, and I said no. She asked me what I did, and I said I was just a friend of Mike's and his family, who were rich. She said I certainly *must* have had some strange things happen to me, in a wild romantic country like this, but I had to tell her no, I hadn't. I had to tell her that most of the time things were quiet with me.

But what I mostly tried to do was keep her talking, which wasn't hard, because she had been lonesome herself. I listened to her practically all afternoon, and when a little before dark some bandits came into the cage and jabbered for a while, I didn't pay the slightest attention—at least, not until I happened to look up and found everybody staring at me.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm afraid you're in for something," Mommsen said sadly.

"Oh, it's fairly safe," cried Racketty-Rax. "I'm really pretty good. I'm getting better all the time."

"What's all this about?" I asked.

Mommsen, who could understand their dialect better than anybody else, explained.

"They want some amusement. They're just like children: they must be kept amused or they'll get into mischief. They're tired of hearing Gladys play, and I can't say as I blame them—"

"*What?*" yelped Gladys, sitting up. We'd thought she was asleep.

"—and so now they've decided that they want the knife-throwing act again. Only of course Ralston's dead."

I said, "Well, I'd sure hate to be the guy who takes his place."

"Well, that's just it. They've talked it over, and they've decided that *you* ought to take his place."

"What was that you just said about people getting tired of my playing?" demanded Gladys. But nobody noticed her. Everybody was looking at me.

"I tried to talk them out of it, but I can't. They're determined it's got to be you."

I shook my head. I said that I didn't want to imply that there was anything defective in Racketty-Rax's technique as a knife tosser but that I personally was unaccustomed to the pleasure of standing up to such a barrage and I was afraid that my awkwardness would tend to dim his undoubted talents, and so I must respectfully decline.

Mommsen mopped his face, shook a huge soupy head.

"You don't understand. They won't take no for an answer, this bunch. You saw what they did to Ralston? They're very insistent."

"And I didn't even hit Ralston," put in Racketty-Rax. "But of course, he was much thinner than you are."

One of our visitors was that same squat solid Chink who had fired at my feet when we were captured. He was nobody's fool, that guy! Now he grunted, and said something quickly and contemptuously to Mommsen, and then started to move toward the door.

"He says," interpreted Mommsen, "that if you don't start in right away he'll get the rest of them to cut off all our toes, beginning with the big toes, one every fifteen

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minutes until you change your mind. He really means that, too."

And I knew that he really did. And they all looked at me. So after a while I got up, shrugged my shoulders.

"It's too bad the light's so poor today," said Racketty-Rax as we went outside. "But I'll do the best I can."

CHAPTER IV

THE LION AND THE PLANE

THE only satisfaction I had was that she couldn't see me. I was propped against a teak tree, and every cutthroat in camp was there, but the place wasn't visible from the cage.

I hope I didn't make any faces. It was hard to know. The brigands of course were watching me closely, for to them it was less an exhibition of skill on the part of Racketty-Rax than a test of my nerves; not so much a performance as a new kind of torture. They laughed a lot, and cat-called; but I think that on the whole I disappointed them.

For one thing, I forced myself to keep my eyes open even at the instant when Racketty-Rax would let fly. This doesn't mean that I saw much. I didn't, for example, see the faces in the chortling eager audience. I was far too busy concentrating on the task of keeping my own face straight.

Maybe now and then a muscle twitched; I don't know. Maybe they were simply laughing to try to get me rattled. Anyway they gave up laughing after a while, probably getting sore because I wouldn't go jumpy.

I would stare hard at Racketty-Rax. There was something Napoleonic about the shrimp—if you can imagine Napoleon winding up like a baseball pitcher. He had a little table of knives, a table hardly any lower than he was; and though they were all exactly the same he would pick one for each throw with all the fussiness of a champ tennis player hefting rackets before a match.

Never glancing at me, his tiny face very serious, he would balance the thing carefully, and perhaps after a while put it back on the table and pick another. Then he would change his stance several times. He refused to be hurried, and never paid the slightest heed to the audience.

They had explained, with unmistakable gestures, that if he missed me by more than an inch he would be sorry. There was a guy behind him with a whippy steel rod, like a heavy fishing rod, and he slashed Racketty-Rax across the calves with this a few times, just by way of a sample. Racketty-Rax never winced. He was absorbed in his art.

Not until he was ready would he really lift his head and look at me where I stood. At practically that same instant he would throw.

The knife would lie on the air like a streak of light; then it would go *tzung!* under one of my armpits or within half an inch of one of my cheeks or just above my head, biting its way into the tree.

And I would breathe again.

He must have thrown them very hard. Teak isn't like oak or maple. Only one of the ten failed to stick; that had been a high one and when it came loose it tumbled right down in front of my face and its point scraped my chin, drawing a few drops of blood. I could hardly feel the cut, it was so slight; but the bandits whooped.

ONLY one of the knives hit me directly. *Tzung!* it went, and I heard a gasp from the spectators and knew that something must have happened. I stood perfectly still; and half a second later I began to feel the pain in my left arm just about half way between the elbow and the shoulder.

The pain was sharp and burny. The knife, I could figure, must have gone through the loose of my flesh. It couldn't have struck muscle or I'd have felt it.

Well, I didn't move, and didn't let on in any way that I'd been hit, and I guess no blood soaked through the sleeve. Anyway the boys began to get disappointed and to pay more attention to Racketty-Rax. He was stealing the show. Which was okay by me!

Racketty-Rax himself was alarmed about that throw. He stood motionless a moment, watching me, his mouth open, his eyes bugging out. Not until he saw that I wasn't going to fall, did he move. The bandit behind him cracked him across the calves again, and with great dignity, ignoring this wallop, Racketty-Rax selected another knife.

It made me feel good, in some peculiar way, to realize that somebody else was frightened too.

When the tenth knife had been thrown, *tzunging* into the tree so close to the right side of my neck that I could actually feel the flat of it when it quivered, they all crowded around me, babbling and blowing their foul breath into my face.

Racketty-Rax came too, but he was more formal. Imperiously—and it seemed to amuse them—he brushed the others aside. With the most elaborate gestures, with finicky care, as if he were the only person alive capable of doing this he withdrew the knives one by one.

When I realized that there was going to be another tossing, a command performance, as you might say, I got really weak in the knees. I didn't know whether I could stand another one. It had taken all the nerve I possessed to keep quiet during the first.

Racketty-Rax, leaning over to tug out a knife, whispered. "They're getting interested in me. Watch your chance."

For a moment I didn't get him. Then when I did I understood the reason for his motions. It wasn't just showmanship. It was a deliberate attempt to draw attention to himself, thereby taking it away from me. For I was nearer to the edge of the clearing—and I had longer legs.

I did not answer or even do anything to show I'd heard. The knives in his hands, Racketty-Rax stalked grandly back to his table, where he arranged them with ceremony. But the bandits were watching me too. Four or five had rifles cradled in their arms; while behind the tree, a little to one side in case a knife should go wild, was a guy with a double-barreled shotgun.

It was getting dark.

Racketty-Rax flexed his legs, flexed his fingers too, touched a handkerchief to his lips, carefully wiped his hands. He patted back his hair. He cleared his throat.

He picked up a knife.

It seemed like he picked the heart right out of me when he did that. I wasn't at all sure that I could watch him throw at me again without screaming. *He* wasn't too sure of himself, either. I knew that.

He balanced the knife, shrugged, put it back, picked another, balanced that.

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Suddenly he looked up and threw.

There was the flash that was like a crack of light from a slit in a door which is immediately covered. Just a flash, that's all. There was no *zung!* But I heard a chopped squeal of fear behind me—and then I knew what had happened. Racketty-Rax had deliberately thrown at the guy with the shotgun.

HE HADN'T intended to hit him but only to make him spring out of the way, which would give the midget some grounds for arguing that it had really been a slip and not dirty work.

But they didn't give him any chance to argue. As I whirled, I glimpsed them closing in. I guess they weren't very nice to him. He must have expected that, too. It must have taken a lot of nerve to do what he did.

Well, I didn't stop to chide them for being poor sports. It was my duty to save the ones still alive, if I could.

The Chink with the shotgun had knocked himself off balance, though he hadn't actually fallen down; but for a split second there he was in no position to aim and fire.

And in that split second I sprinted past him.

Something went *twang!* like the twang of a taut steel wire—an angry sound; and with it, from behind me, there was the curt crack of a rifle. Then the twang again, and the crack, separate sounds though they came at the same time. Then both of them again.

Naturally I didn't run straight. I zigzagged. Sometimes I'd hear bullets clunk solemnly into trees on my right or left, or sometimes, grazing them, they would tear out splinters. Sometimes the dirt at my feet, or just ahead of me, would suddenly become all churned up, like muddy water disturbed with a stick.

But it was practically night now, and there among the teak trees, dodging back and forth, squirming and twisting, bending low, running like mad, I couldn't have made a very good target.

At last when I couldn't run any more for a minute or so, I stopped and listened, and over the sound of my own panting I heard that they were quite a way behind.

I went and climbed a tree. Not a teak tree, of course; it was a tree with lower branches. The last place people look for things is up. If you want to hide anything, hide it above the level of a person's eyes. It's man's instinct, when anybody's chasing him, just as it is with an animal, to burrow down into the earth, or crouch among some bushes, to get below something, *underneath* something; and the result is that it's our instinct to look for people and things in places like that. But the safest place is above.

This was only a theory, but it worked out. The brigands passed right underneath me, muttering to themselves, straining their eyes, holding their guns in readiness, but not a one glanced up. After a while they returned, passing so close that I could have reached down and kicked their hats off They'd given up the search.

Even so, it was two hours before I let myself climb down.

The sky had cleared by that time and there was a good deal of moonlight streaking down. I found the path without any trouble, at a point above the camp, and with my general sense of direction still holding good I turned in the direction of the village.

Some of those Kamorirrians can cover distance at a most amazing pace, back there in that wild country. They are lizards against the faces of cliffs, deer for speed in the valleys, goats on the mountains themselves.

There is no road anywhere in Kamorirri and it stands to reason no signpost. None of the natives have ever seen a map, and they wouldn't know what a compass was. But from any part of the sultanate they can head accurately and unhestitatingly for the center, the capital, the palace itself. I don't know how they do it; but they never fail.

It was my thought to send out messengers. I could speak enough of the native language to make myself understood, and I could make signs to show that Mike was in danger. Also I could give them various articles belonging to me, which would be recognized at the palace.

This was why I made a dive for the village.

MY NOSE warned me in advance, telling me what my brain refused to believe. It must be that the only reason we hadn't learned earlier about what had happened to the village was that the wind had been the other way.

Well, the wind had shifted since then. Climbing the path, I knew what had happened.

You do, too, of course, by this time! It was pretty horrible. Those butchers couldn't have had any real purpose in doing such a thing—there couldn't been any loot in a miserable clump of nip-thatch huts—except sheerly that of slaking their blood thirst.

There had been maybe twenty men in the village, and perhaps twice as many women and children, and no doubt there had been a certain amount of resistance—though what good that would do, with only spears and bows-and-arrows, against a surprise attack by trained soldiers equipped with firearms?

I guess the slaughter had been complete. I saw no evidence that any of the visitors had been killed, though of course one corpse is very much the same as another after it's been burned.

For they had burned the huts, and in the middle of the huts the villagers. They had just heaped them up and burned them. I won't describe the scene; I prefer not to think about it. The best I can say is that it was gray and utterly dead, the drear home of ashes and bones; and in the moonlight it was deserted even by the buzzards, which I could see had been taking an interest in certain unburned portions of bodies only a little earlier.

Well, I went away fast, almost as if somebody were chasing me. I gave the bandit camp a wide berth, rejoining the path at about the point where the long shapeless body of Ralston lay sprawled in its purple tights. The little glass balls gleamed in the moonlight. Buzzards had been busy on Ralston too, and also the ants. In fact the ants were still at work.

A little further on I heard the sound of a footstep, and with my heart thumping wildly I dodged behind a tree. One of the highwaymen was coming along the path, walking toward the camp. What he happened to be doing there I don't know. Maybe he'd got lost while chasing me, and had just found his way back to the path. Anyway there he was, clear in the moonlight, a rifle over his shoulder, knife and pistol at his side.

He was going to pass very close to me, and I had a fleet thought of jumping him as he came alongside. I was pretty sure I could get his weapons and knock him cuckoo before he ever knew what happened.

But I decided against this. He might have time to let out a yell to be heard.

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So I decided to let him pass.

Just as he came to the nearest part of the path to me, his legs not two feet from my face, I felt something small and cold pressed firmly against the back of my neck.

I WONDER to this day how it was that I didn't let out a scream. I guess I was too scared to. Anyway, what I did was stay perfectly still, as if frozen there—which I practically was—until the highwayman had walked past me and out of sight in the direction of the camp; and then I turned my head very slowly and found myself face to face with Joseph the tiger.

Joseph was lonely. He wanted to make friends; and that was why he had pressed his cold nose against the back of my neck.

But I was so mad, what with the release from the nervous tension and everything, that if it hadn't been near the camp I really think I would have busted that beast in the jaw. Joseph was a big fellow and must have weighed close to three hundred pounds, and if his teeth weren't so hot any more his claws were still very long and sharp. All the same, I was too sore to think about these things. I wonder to this day how I managed to control myself.

"Get out of here!" I hissed. "Gwan! Scram! Scat!"

Joseph gave me a reproachful sniff and mooched away. And after a while I followed the path to the edge of the forest and then walked out across the stump-strewn plain to the machine I'd come in.

Now I'm no aviator and never pretended to be; and in fact I usually am scared when I'm up in a plane, except when Mike's at the controls. But every now and then when we were in the air on a longish trip, say down to Singapore, I would slip into the driver's seat to give Mike a chance to stretch his legs. I had actually flown quite a few miles in this way.

But there's a lot of difference between holding the stick in calm weather, with a crack pilot like Mike sitting next to you, and really knowing how to fly. I had never, for example, handled that silver monoplane in bumpy weather. And I had certainly never taken her off or brought her down, which was what I was going to try to do now.

IT WAS the only thing I could see. My chances of being killed were so good that I didn't care to think about them, and even if I got up off that stump-strewn field okay, and fumbled around for and found the palace itself, there still would remain the little business of landing in the only flat surface for many, many miles—the tiny courtyard that Mike used for a field.

I was going to do this! *Me!* But as I say, I couldn't think of anything else. I couldn't barge back into the camp all unarmed. There might not be another village anywhere near here, and if there was I wouldn't know how to find it.

If I struck out cross-country into China I might go for days without reaching any outpost of civilization, and even when I did reach such an outpost how could I explain myself? The hill-people could do it in a couple of days, but it would take me at least a couple of weeks to beat my way back through the jungle to the palace itself—supposing that I ever found it at all.

To be sure, the thirty guardsmen might appear the following day, but I couldn't be sure of this. It all depended on the condition of the trails.

So it looked like the air or nothing.

Mike's machine is the latest in every respect, and it has brakes and a self-starter. I figured that the self-starter was going to make the take-off easier. I figured wrong.

The plane wasn't heavy, and I didn't have much difficulty in wheeling it around to the place I wanted it, facing into what breeze there was, which blew toward the outlaw camp. This I did in the sad moonlight, all alone in the middle of a plain full of stumps which lay like blurred black ghosts. Each one of those stumps, I had an idea, was a live thing that had coiled its strength like a snake and was ready to strike at me when I came close—or at least, to strike at the plane.

At last I got everything the way I wanted it, and I got into the plane and tested the controls. I knew that I'd have to act fast, once I got started. I wouldn't be able to warm the engine up anywhere near as thoroughly as I should in order to make such a quick take-off, because when I gave it the gun they would be almost sure to hear it back at the camp. The breeze, such as it was, was that way.

The choke out, the spark retarded. . . . I was tense. I stepped on the starter.

A faint-hearted whir.

I cursed, and examined the connections. They were okay. The trouble was that the battery was low.

So once again I got everything set, and I climbed out and grasped the propeller and turned her over. She thundered, spluttered, and while I was dashing back for the cabin, died.

This happened five times before she really caught up. I got behind the controls, pushed the choke back, advanced the spark. I opened the throttle. It made a hell of a racket. It seemed to me that it could have been heard for miles. I waited as long as I dared, and then I gave it everything it had—and released the brakes.

Oh, those teak stumps! I'll see them to my dying day!

Even the ground between the stumps was not any too smooth. Me and the plane bumped so violently that I felt I must be knocking all the fillings out of my teeth. The noise was terrific. We began to rise a little, and then we whammed back, jouncing so hard that my head hit the ceiling, which maybe made me a little groggy.

Anyway, what happened after that happened so fast that I couldn't be expected to remember it. I didn't go up against the ceiling this time: the ceiling came down on me! The ground, studded with stumps, swooped in front of me like something swung on a string. I had just sense enough left, when I knew I was upside-down, to shut off the ignition.

CHAPTER V

BLAZE OF GLORY

BERTINA HOWLAND was rubbing my face with a handkerchief soaked in eau de cologne, and she was saying, "You had quite a time for yourself, didn't you? The Prince is worried to death."

Even without the sound of her voice and the sight of her face I would have known where I was. There is no mistaking the stink of a lion's cage.

Mike came scurrying over, and his face lighted up when he saw me with my eyes open. Mike's quick with his emotions; and he isn't like an Englishman or some Americans who are afraid to let anybody see the way they feel.

"Georgie Lindbergh! What did you do, ground-loop?"

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I muttered, "Is that what you call it?"

"Wonder you weren't killed! We heard the engine, 'way up here, and I kept thinking 'Poor Georgie! There he goes!' And all the Chinese snatched up their guns and ran. They just got back."

I lifted my head, which hurt, and saw that it was dawn. Birds were chittering and monkeys chattering, and sunlight streaked down between the glossy leaves of the trees.

"Am I hurt?" I asked, dumb.

The only pain I could feel, outside of a dull headache, was a burning in the upper part of my left arm, where the knife had gone.

"You've got a few scratches and bruises," Bertina answered cheerfully. "But you must have bumped your head pretty badly. Might have a concussion. Better go easy."

"What happened?"

"That's what we want to know. Right after you left here yesterday afternoon there was a lot of yelling and shooting, and later they carried Racketty-Rax back. They'd given him an awful beating, and he was more dead than alive. He's sleeping over there now."

"He's got guts, that midget," I said, and I told them what had happened. "You've got to hand it to a guy like that."

"You'd better be still," Bertina said. I had been trying to sit up, but she pushed me back. "There'll be action enough, once they've made up their minds what to do about us. They're holding a powwow out there right now."

So she shooed Mike away, and I closed my eyes again, and she went on bathing my face with eau de cologne, which felt good.

After a while I thought of something, and I opened my eyes.

"Say, listen! What was that you said a little while ago about some prince or something?"

She smiled. And she had a kind of fondness in that smile, and in her eyes too when she looked down at me.

"Why," she murmured, "Mikuud-Phni Luangba slurred over your name when he introduced you, but I know now that you're George Marlin."

JUST like that! She didn't seem to be as excited at the idea of being in close quarters with the descendant of a hundred generations of warrior kings, as at the idea of being in close quarters with *me!* She pronounced that "George Marlin" as if it really meant something. And in a way, of course, it does. In this part of the world I'm sort of famous. But after all, I'm nothing but a San Francisco cop who happened to get a break, while Mike is a member of a ruling house.

"There must be some mistake."

"The mistake," she interrupted, "was when two or three times you started to speak of your friend as 'His Highness' but you corrected yourself. But not soon enough."

This was true, though I'm sure she was the only one who got it. When just the two of us are together, Mike will always be simply Mike to me. But after all, he's got more than a fancy title; he's got a position; he's somebody. And in the presence of anyone else, no matter how informal the occasion, I've always been careful to "highness" him. I've made this so much a habit that I've even made myself *think* of him as "your highness" when other people are around.

Well, it didn't matter, as long as the secret did not leave the cage. The only thing is, it made me embarrassed because Bertina seemed to think that I was a big shot.

"You know," she said, "I have been trying for a month to get permission to travel up to Kammorirri, and now the very person I wanted to see comes down from there to me."

"You mean you want to interview Mike? I doubt whether—"

"I want to interview *you!*"

Well, I tried to talk her out of it, but it wasn't any use. I tried to tell her that all I was was just another flatfoot, but she insisted that I was a Figure of Romance.

"Now Mike," I said, "that's a different matter—"

"Never mind about Mike. I want to hear about some of *your* adventures."

"I don't have any adventures. I live a very quiet life."

She repeated some stories she'd heard about me, and most of them were baloney and I told her that all of them were, but she was unconvinced. She said that where there was so much smoke there must be a certain amount of fire. She said that just for a white man, any white man, to get up to that dizzy breathless palace where the Sultan of Kammorirri lived like an eagle, was sumpin. Just to *get* there! Missionaries couldn't, she pointed out. Diplomats couldn't. Even traders couldn't.

"That's because there's nothing there that the rest of the world wants," I answered. "If Kammorirri had a few oil wells or a tin mine or two you can bet it'd be packed with Englishmen and Frenchmen and Japs, falling all over themselves trying to 'protect' it. It doesn't control any important mountain pass, it hasn't any harbor, it hasn't even got a piece of level land large enough to make an airport out of. So the rest of the world lets it alone. There are some old ruby mines, which is where the sultans got all their wealth from, but they were worked out long ago."

"You're trying to belittle yourself," she said. "I'm sure that you have a fascinating story to tell."

It was good to listen to her. It was good to see her eyes light up, and to hear that nice low American voice. Oh, sure, I was homesick; I've admitted that already. And while I lay there, with her mopping my face with cologne, I couldn't help wondering what would happen if we all did get out of this pickle alive, and if then I resigned.

It would be hard to leave Mike. But I'd done my work. I'd trained the Kammorirri police force and army, which was one and the same thing. And I knew I could always get my old investigator's job back with the Great Western Insurance people, and it hadn't been such a bad job either, though of course it didn't pay as much as I got now.

But maybe they'd give me a raise, considering all the prestige I'd gathered. Or then again, maybe they wouldn't. The name George Marlin might mean a lot in this part of the world, but how many customers did the Great Western have or expect to get here?

And at best, I would be nothing but a common ordinary dick, while she was the daughter of a senator. . . .

Still and all, they can't hang a man for dreaming.

SHE was giving me a nice little smile and was starting to say "Now suppose we get back to—" when Mike came over.

"Excuse me for interrupting," he said, "but could you tell me, Miss Howland, whether they took any personal articles from you?"

"Well yes," said Bertina. "They took my wristwatch and two rings and some odds and ends of Cambodian silver work I'd bought more as souvenirs than anything else. My

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bag, too. It took three days of heavy sign-languaging to get back my compact even, and in the meanwhile I looked a fright."

Mike nodded. He looked serious.

"They're getting fidgety out there. They've been breaking off fancy bits of woodwork from the trunks, pieces with lettering on them, and chunks of gilded gingerbread. I'm afraid they want it just for the same reason they wanted your personal belongings. They want to be able to prove, later, to somebody in the outside world, that they actually have got you hidden."

"But where are they going to keep me? Here?"

Mike shook his head.

"Not anywhere, I think. That's the trouble. I don't want to frighten you, but it looks as if they're agreed that it would be better to follow the example set by so many kidnapers." He nodded toward the clearing. "As the old pirates used to say, dead men tell no tales."

There was an air of bustle in the clearing. The bandits were breaking camp. They had their weapons, their scanty personal possessions, their loot, collected in bundles which some had already fastened upon their backs. They were tightening their boots, snapping looks up at what could be seen of the sky.

A little earlier they had built a fire under the boiler of the calliope, meaning to have another concert; but they must have given up this idea. They were in fact doing so many things out there in the clearing that despite the fact that this group was very near the cage, almost alongside of it, it was some minutes before Bertina and I saw the Chinamen Mike indicated.

There were three, two of whom were taking eight-inch brown paper sticks out of a box and stacking them criss-cross on the ground, while the third cut some lengths of white thick cottony cord.

"What's that?" Bertina asked.

"The same stuff," Mike answered, "that they blew up your automobile with. They must have stolen it from some construction gang."

She said "Oh . . ." She had shown a lot of courage, and I admired her, but now she wouldn't talk because she feared her voice would quaver.

"I wouldn't have mentioned it if it didn't seem a sure thing," Mike explained gently. "Mr. Mommsen and I managed to overhear some of their conversations, and I'm afraid there's no doubt of what they intend to do. What's more, I'm afraid it will happen very soon. In case you want the time to pray."

The man with the fuse had measured off three lengths of about five feet, and he tamped one end of each into a blasting cap and thrust the blasting cap into a stick of dynamite. He selected three different sticks in three different parts of the pile, but all low.

There must have been a hundred sticks altogether. The Chink laid the three fuses along the ground.

The others were all set. In fact they seemed anxious to go. They were jittery, and had been that way since my escape and recapture. I think maybe the sight of the plane had worried into them. Desperadoes like that are always afraid of airplanes; and these babies might have figured that where there was one there might soon be many more.

They gathered at the other end of the clearing, and the dark squat one, the one who had originally captured Mike and me, and who seemed to be the nearest thing they had to a leader, yapped a command. One of the others approached the dynamite. He was holding a fancy gold cigarette lighter, undoubtedly stolen.

It was clear that the squat guy wanted to see with his own eyes that the fuses were lit before he left; and what's more, he wasn't going to let anybody else go until he did!

"Well," said Gladys, "we'll finish up in a blaze of glory, anyway."

I guess she'd been in the show business so long that even when she was about to be blown to bits she couldn't help thinking what a sight it would be. Mommsen's Celebrated Spectacle. Sure.

There was a sharp slatty crack from the forest, and the Chink with the lighter went over backward and began to cough blood.

CHAPTER VI

THE WORLD CRACKS UP

FOR a little while after that everybody was running in all directions at once and nobody knew what was happening, except that whatever it was it involved a lot of noise.

The first shot was followed by a swift splatter of others. Chinamen began to fold up. Chinamen began to slide to their knees, here and there a Chinaman even fell flat. It was fantastic the way they did it. They were like that many dolls in a shooting gallery.

Two or three broke and ran, and these were not seen any more. A few started to crawl, moaning. There were a few also who never moved again. The rest, after the first shock of surprise, and under the barked commands of the squat dark Chink, began to get a grip on themselves.

I think that maybe they had ordinarily been sort of communists, if not politically then practically; but when a really dangerous situation rose, like this, they didn't do any sort of conferring and they didn't take any votes: they just snapped into it when their natural leader, the squat guy, shouted.

If they had run away, then and there, they would have escaped—provided they ran in the right direction. For this was not meant to be a surprise attack, as it seemed at first. The camp was not surrounded. We later learned that the shot which laid the man with the lighter low was a wild one, originally aimed at a picket.

Once they got under control, the bandits showed an astonishing discipline. Naturally I was interested in watching them, this being my profession.

Under the menace of spotty gunfire, and not ever being sure which direction the next chunk of lead would come from, they moved fast. They darted from place to place, never scooping out any sort of trenches, but piling up their packs and bundles and rearranging the trucks so as to form a square. Two of the trucks, by means of ropes, they toppled over on their sides: these were the closed ones. The calliope formed a third side of this improvised fort; while the cage we were in, with the front of it facing the forest, made up the very narrow fourth side.

BECAUSE the cage truck *did* face toward the forest, we could not get a clear look out there but only an oblique one. Bullets clanged against the bars, but by lying at the extreme front end of the cage we were fairly safe—except from ricochets.

But it was hard to stay there. Hard for Mike and me,

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anyway. We wanted badly to see what was going on.

So we wriggled on our tummies to the danger end of the cage, and there, with lead going *whee-ee-ee* above us, we snooped.

We didn't see much. The forest was dappled with sunlight but contained no hint of human occupancy. It was, as before, like a park, but a deserted park. There was so little underbrush that it was a mystery where the shots were coming from.

Just the same, they were coming! They weren't all wild, either. The Chinks had already learned that they had to be careful about showing themselves. There were some good marksmen out there.

"Well, what we're both thinking is right," Mike said after a while. "I just caught a glimpse of one of those black helmets."

I nodded. I had glimpsed one too, maybe the same one, as a soldier slipped like a shadow from tree to tree.

"They certainly made wonderful time," I said.

The black trench helmets had come only a few months ago, as part of a shipment of uniforms, when the Sultan, following the trend of the times (which was something he didn't usually do) decided to triple and modernize his army.

They came from the States, where the Sultan had bought the rest of his military stuff, the first of its sort ever to hit Kammorirri. I suppose they'd been made for some home guard outfit, or maybe some college boys' training corps, and then black-japanned when they were found to be too bright, and sent to Kammorirri on the theory that Kammorirri was so far away that they'd never be sent back.

They weren't really what we'd ordered. But we took what we could get, practically all the rest of the world being at war and therefore too busy to worry about Kammorirrian customers.

Anyway the native soldiers liked them. Most of them had never had a hat on before in their lives, and I don't suppose any of their ancestors ever had either, all the way back to the days when they slogged about in paleolithic slime; and I guess that if you wanted to moralize and so forth, you could remark that it was a pity that the first hats they ever did wear had to be steel ones. But anyway that's how it was.

"Only a few years ago in a border affray like this," Mike said thoughtfully, "those men would have come rushing in like maniacs—and got themselves shot to bits. They're the most reckless fighters in the world, ordinarily. That's always been their greatest fault." He glanced sideways at me. "But now look at them. You've done a swell piece of work with those boys, Georgie."

For all I know I might have blushed; my face certainly felt hot enough. But then it was a hot spot we were in.

"I never had a chance to teach them to take prisoners," I replied. "And I don't think they know what it means to parley."

Mike smiled a little, half proudly, half ruefully. He got my point. When the guardsmen had properly surrounded the place and scouted it out, so that they'd learned how weak a force held it, they would unquestionably rush. They wouldn't wait for a flag of truce: they'd just rush. They *might* see Mike and me in time to recognize us and obey our commands; or they might not. When the charge came, it was going to be pretty bad. There wasn't going to be much time for explanations.

"They your men out there, Mr. Marlin?"

I turned my head with a start, as Mike did, and we both scowled to see Bertina crawling in between us. She wasn't going to miss anything! She was breathless, and her eyes shone bright.

I nodded.

"The U. S. Marines in disguise," I said. "The only thing is, when they get really riled up they don't know one guy from another."

"They're doing a sweet piece of work," she said, squinting in a professional manner. "You must have trained them well."

"Too damn well," I muttered.

BY THIS time the camp was surrounded. The besiegers had the situation well under control, while the besieged, doubled up behind their trucks and bundles, were afraid to show themselves. It did not surprise any of us when they hoisted a tablecloth.

It didn't get them anywhere. In fact it was shot full of holes immediately, and lowered. Those gorillas out there didn't know what a flag of truce was. The Chinks would have been glad to get away with their lives, and would have turned us loose without hesitation; but the only kind of fight the Kammorirrians knew anything about was a fight to the finish.

I had taught them to keep their heads down and not rush into a thing until they'd taken their time and looked it over first; but I had not yet got around to teaching them the difference between an enemy and an innocent bystander. Once they got steamed up, anything and everything that got in their way was just out of luck.

But of course if they knew Mike was there, it would be different. And if they knew *I* was there, then they'd know that Mike was.

So I raised my head and started to bellow a command in Kammorirrian. It was a command to retreat, so I guess they wouldn't have known what it meant even if they'd heard it. But anyway they didn't hear it. There was a blast of machine gun fire and I ducked my head just in time to miss a flock of metal that came close to parting at least my hair and maybe even my brains, if any.

I tried again, a moment later, and the same thing happened. Out there, of course, they never could see who I was, me being in the shadow of the cage and low against the floor and they never heard enough of my voice to recognize it.

And if *I* couldn't make myself heard, with my bull's bass, then certainly Mike wouldn't be able to.

Still, it would be hard lines to be killed by your own men; so I thought I'd have another try. Just as I was about to open my mouth, up above the level of the floor appeared the square yellow head of the outlaw chief. He spurted words like a broken water main; then he was gone.

He had declared, Mike interpreted, that if any of us made another sound, for any reason whatsoever, he would have us fired upon.

The back of the cage being all bars like the sides, he could have done this easily.

Mike wriggled to the edge of the floor and tried to get the chief's attention by whistling, yoohooing, and even sometimes cautiously shouting. He tried to call out that the men besieging us were friends of ours and could be induced to cease firing and back away if they knew we were here. He took a chance that the chief, hearing, would wheel around and blast him then and there.

But the chief either didn't hear or didn't give a hoot.

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Only once again he turned toward us, and that was when, dashing sweat from his face, he savagely told us, according to Mike that we could be damn' sure that if the barricades were stormed *we* would be disposed of no matter what else happened. He would save his last clip of cartridges for us he said, according to Mike, and he had instructed his lieutenants to do the same.

We tried to get Mommsen to the back of the cage to argue with him and explain, but the circus proprietor ("seventeen years in the Orient, sir") was stiff with fear and couldn't be induced to budge.

Anyway, it was never very likely that the Kammorirrians would hear us, even if we dared to yell. There was too much shooting.

WE HAD a flare of hope when something darkened a between-bars space for an instant, and the diminutive Hiccup thudded into our midst. Hiccup was scared. But he trusted Mike and me. He was ready to do anything we told him—provided he could understand it. He looked up to us, with his funny little old-man mouth working, his shoebutton eyes bright with earnestness, convinced that we were twitchy, and teetering on the verge of the noise; but he had it figured that we were the only ones who could help him.

The kidnapers had already stripped us of personal articles like jewelry, so I tore a button off my shirt. The buttons were tricky glass ones containing little French flags, that I'd bought in Phnom Penh; everybody in the Kammorirrian army would know those buttons. Each individual private had used to stare hard at them while I stood giving him a bawling out about the way he held his gun or the way he wore his uniform.

I handed the button to Hiccup, and I made signs. The signs might not have been very complete or very elaborate, but you must remember that all this while I was flat on my belly. I pointed toward the forest and made the motions of handing the button to somebody else. Then, to emphasize it, I made the shape of a trench helmet with my hands over my head. *Metal,* I wanted to explain. A *metal* hat. So I tapped one of the iron bars of the cage.

Hiccup was all enthusiasm. Sure, he got it! Gibbering, the button clutched in a wrinkled paw, he swung out through the bars and dropped to the pile of dynamite just below.

There he paused a moment, while we held our breath. Then he scrambled up on the top side of one of the overturned trucks, and stood there for perhaps two whole minutes, exposed to rifle fire, scared. He knew that bullets were whizzing around him, poor creature, but he didn't know what they were or where they came from.

Suddenly he looked over toward us and made a reassuring gesture. We were filled with hope then. We were sure he was going to jump down into No Man's and and hop to the forest to deliver the button. After which, of course, the firing would cease.

Instead, Hiccup reached suddenly down to the *inside* of the barricade, plucked off the felt forage cap of a Chinese army deserter, and at short range threw the button at this Chink's head with all his might.

The Chink only ducked lower, yowling, no doubt under the impression that he'd been grazed by a slug. The button rolled harmlessly on the ground.

Hiccup cocked his head and looked toward us, waiting for applause. All he got was an additional volley of deaf-and-dumb signals, which completely confused him. These were from me. Mike had given up.

I tried to motion with both hands, fingers down, that the monk should recover the button. I did this again and again, while Hiccup, perplexed, regarded me with his tiny bright black eyes.

The interruption to the soundless one-sided conversation was a honey.

There was a sudden lull in the firing from the forest, and I saw a speck momentarily against the sky, and I heard the Chinks screech in fright as they ducked, covering their heads with their arms. I couldn't duck, myself. I was already as low as I could get. But I closed my eyes; and as I did so, the whole world seemed to come apart.

CHAPTER VII

YANKEE DOODLE

THE first thought that flashed through my mind, even before the explosion, was that this was a hand grenade. We had imported a lot of hand grenades, along with submachine guns and modern rifles and so forth; and I, who had never handled one before in my life, after practicing in secret for a while, had instructed certain selected guardsmen in their use.

They were crazy about them! The pulling of the plug, the hiss, the long-armed throw, at last the *boom,* followed by a rattle of stones, a flutter of leaves, and the startled squawks of departing birds—these fascinated the simple Kammorirrian mind.

It was only natural that they had brought along a few grenades on this trip, in the hope of finding some excuse for using them.

But I knew from the sound of the explosion that it wasn't an ordinary grenade. And even before I opened my eyes, I knew from the hiss and *swee-ee* of the spreading flames, what it was.

Thermite. An incendiary hand bomb. The sort of things they drop on London, only small enough to throw.

The boys got it mixed in with the others, I guess. Or it may be that they seized this opportunity to throw the thermite bomb, having always been anxious to do so. We only had a few of them, and I'd never given anybody permission to throw them in practice, the truth of the matter being that I was afraid of the things myself.

Well, I'd reason to be. This one didn't just start a fire: it started a whole landscapeful of them. Little ones and big ones. They burned brightly, briskly. They seemed to be enjoying themselves. Nobody else was.

The place was pandemonium. We in the cage had been lucky that none of the flaming thermite was thrown between the bars. Trapped as we were, we wouldn't have lasted five minutes, had that been the case. The stuff has a fiendish way of spreading. It's all over the place at once. And there's nothing stodgy about the fires either.

But if none came inside, the roof of the cage, which was wooden, and the floor, likewise made of wood, caught fire promptly. The bars admitted plenty of air, which was a break for us, and the flames were confined to the back end; but even so, we were in a bad spot.

Nobody behind that barricade was going to take the trouble to come to the side of the cage and unlock the door, even if that door had been protected against gunfire. They had too much else to do.

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THE noise out there was hideous. I guess Hell must sound something like that, and I'm serious. Both the closed trucks were burning; boxes of food were burning, and bundles of loot. What's worse, the soldiers themselves were ablaze. At least, their clothing was.

Some devoted themselves to bapping it out with their hands. Others, the wounded, and two or three who'd been blinded by the explosion, rolled on the ground screaming, begging their companions to help them, while little angry eager yellow flames hurried over them, slithering through their clothes to the delicate shrinking skin.

It was a wonderful weapon, that thermite bomb. It was the most modern thing that backward Kammorirri had ever known. Even the butchers of Europe, admittedly the best, would have been proud of it.

I don't know whether the others remembered, but one of my first thoughts, after I'd made sure that Mike and Bertina were not hurt, was of the dynamite. From the middle of the cage, a place too hot to stand very long, I could see the pile outside, the neatly stacked sticks, the three long white fuses.

Not a fuse had become directly ignited, but there were fires burning in the weeds and grass between and all around them. None of the paper wrappers was blazing, but this didn't make so much difference.

Dynamite itself will just burn, if exposed to flame, the way unwrapped gunpowder will burn, though not as briskly. A big pile of it, overheated, might explode; but the real danger here lay in the fuses, each of which was crammed into a blasting cap. Blasting caps are temperamental. It doesn't take much to set them off. And if one of these went blooey the whole pile would; in fact the whole clearing!

In no time at all the flames ceased being little licky things, thankful for what they could get to nibble on, and became huge, reaching, roaring sheets of destruction. The roof of the cage might have been matchwood, the floor celluloid. Smoke swirled past us, thickening, making us cough, making our eyes run. Sparks rose in successive clouds, through which bits of broken burning wood tumbled negligently from the ceiling.

The Chinese like fireworks, but I don't suppose they enjoyed these very much.

The truck was old, and it had probably never been as strong as it should have been, considering what it was made to carry. The whole rear end of it fell off, released bars zigzagging crazily this way and that. Suddenly, just like that, we had an exit—if we could manage to get through it alive.

Big Mommsen rushed, his arms over his head, whimpering, paying no heed to his wife. Bertina Howland was next. She refused to be helped. Mike, tiny brave gentlemanly Mike, with all the gallantry in the world, did his best to shield Gladys Mommsen from the flames as they raced out together.

I couldn't help grinning at the sight, even then. Gladys was big enough to have picked up Mike and thrown him the whole length of the clearing; but wailing and sobbing, she let him lead the way, him protectively gripping an arm that was as big around as his own waist.

And I followed up in the rear carrying Racketty-Rax like a baby. I guess nobody else had remembered the poor little dwarf. He was still unconscious from the beating he'd received for doing one of the most courageous things I've ever seen a man do.

FOR a moment I couldn't see anything, and in fact I didn't dare open my eyes anyway, it was so hot. I heard the flames shrieking around us, and the sparks hissing and spitting.

There was a mad music going through my head, something loud and very familiar that I could hear even above the fire's fury, but I just supposed then that I'd gone haywire or was feverish.

We broke through, somehow, me leaning over to try to protect the dwarf. Then we were clear, with nothing more than burning splotches of grass and weeds around us.

Mike and Bertina were safe. The Mommsens were face down on the grass, in a clear space, and I guessed that they were all right. I put Racketty-Rax between them and sprang toward the dynamite.

All three fuses were burning by this time, and one was within a couple of inches of the blasting cap. I grabbed it, jerked it out. I grabbed and jerked out the others, and threw them away.

That mad loud familiar music was pounding in my ears every second of the time.

On one knee, I looked around in time to see a Chink swinging his rifle toward Bertina and Mike, where they stood. He was close to me. I threw myself sideways against him, and we went down together, coughing and rasping, among the bright pools of flame.

I got a grip on the gun barrel and held it so that the muzzle was high, and I could feel the shock when he pulled the trigger; but that bullet only went zipping through the treetops. With my other hand I slugged him three or four times, and after that he was still.

Once again I started to get up, and this time I found myself facing the square squat thick Chink who never had liked us. He must have figured that the game was up. He had turned his back to the enemy out there in the forest, and he was going to dispose of his prisoners.

His face was streaked with sweat and grime, and twisted with hate. He had his automatic in his hand, and the only reason why he didn't plug me then and there, I figured afterward, was that he was afraid of the bullet going clear through me and into the guy I'd just knocked out. He moved to one side, so as to get a clear shot—

And then the Kammorirrian army burst in upon us.

THEY came from all sides at once, yelling like demons, making themselves heard even above the roar of the flames, the screams of burning men, the mad music.

This is the way (but brandishing mere spears) that their fathers and all their forefathers had used to charge the enemy. But these babies, my own men, the men I'd trained were armed with bayoneted Springfields, with Thompson sub-machine guns, and Colt .45 automatics.

What's more, they knew how to use them! And it was no senseless burst of fury, this. The bandit chief was knocked flat in a shower of lead, and five or six of the tallest guardsmen promptly surrounded Mike and Bertina and the rest of us, while the others mopped up.

It was all over in short order. I guess it was pretty terrible—it certainly was a messy scene afterward—but half fainting the way we were, and with the guardsmen standing protectively round us, we didn't see much of it. By the time Mike and I got around to shouting a command that prisoners be taken provided they threw down their guns and raised both hands, it was too late. Perhaps this was just as well.

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Bertina Howland came toward me, and I saw with a start that she was weeping. It was not like Bertina to weep. It must have been a powerful emotion that gripped her.

"George . . ." she sobbed. "George. . ."

As I say, she came toward me. But when I stretched out my arms, she walked right past me, as if she'd never seen them. She walked to what was left of the cage truck.

"George, my notes have been burned! I tried to save them, when I ran out, but they slipped loose! Oh, I'm just *furious!*"

Mike laid a hand on my arm.

"Thank God I still have my Georgie!" He grinned up into my face. "It's tough sometimes, being a crown prince. But with a guy like you around, that makes it all right. You won't ever quit this job, will you, Georgie? You won't ever get homesick and want to go back, or get married or something?"

I could hear Miss Howland behind me, bemoaning the fact that her typewriter too had been ruined.

"Hell, don't be silly!" I said. "*Me* resign?"

I shook my head, trying to shake that mad music out of my ears, trying to understand things. Why had the boys charged? Why hadn't they waited until the fire drove the Chinks from cover, and then picked them off one by one without exposing themselves? And why, when they had come, had they seemed to know that Mike and I were here?

"My Georgie of many talents! You are even a success as an animal trainer! See?"

And then I realized that the music was real music, or at least real noise, not delirium. And no wonder it was familiar! Earnest little Hiccup, for all the excitement, still anxious to please, had got my directions wrong when I pushed down with my fingers trying to tell him to pick up the button. He had thought it over, and had decided at last that what I wanted him to do was play *Yankee Doodle.*

So he was playing *Yankee Doodle.* With one finger, as I had taught him to do on the harmonium, he was playing it on that wheezy but powerful old calliope.

Out through the vast teak forest sounded the strains, loud enough to be heard for miles, so loud that they had been heard by the Kammorirrian forces.

And this was why the boys had charged. They had known, when they heard *Yankee Doodle,* that I was there, and that therefore Mike must be there. And they had come dashing in to save us from the fire.

Terror-stricken, afraid to stop, head down, eyes closed, Hiccup kept right on playing until we lifted him away from the keyboard.

"He saved our lives," Mike said gravely. "We must see that he is decorated. And your soldiers too. They were magnificent."

"*They* don't get any medals," I growled. "What they get is hell, when we're back at the palace. Discipline's discipline, and even if they did save our lives they had no business bringing along one of those thermite bombs without my permission."

But Mike by that time was looking for his hunting rifles.

MIKE had a soldier behind him carrying those rifles, each back in its green canvas bag, when late that afternoon we went down the path toward the edge of the forest to look over the wreckage of the plane.

"I think I shall have the circus give a command performance at the palace, eh, Georgie? We will entertain them sumptuously, of course. But what about Miss Howland? She has asked me if she could come up to the palace to get an interview. What do you think?"

"You know your father the Sultan better than I do."

"Oh, no! She would not aspire to an interview with *him!* It is undoubtedly *me* she wishes to write up. And I don't care for that, personally. So if you haven't any particular feeling about it," he added carefully, "I think I'll refuse the permission."

"Why not? She's got plenty to write about, as it is."

"Just what I figured."

This was near the spot where Ralston of the purple tights had fallen. His body had been removed a few hours earlier. And now a large male tiger stepped from behind a tree into the middle of the path.

Maybe my nerves were a bit on edge, which was only natural. I stepped toward the tiger, waving my arms.

"Shoo! Get out of here, Joseph! Scram!"

Steel-muscled, it crouched, moving its hind quarters for a spring. Its claws were out, its teeth bared. A growl came from its throat.

And I saw then that this was not Joseph. This was an honest-to-goodness wild tiger.

It sprang.

Mike's shot, considering that he had to snatch the rifle from a bearer behind him, was a miracle of speed. But then Mike always was fast. A faster thinker and a fast shooter. The bullet caught the tiger in mid-air, caught it perfectly just back of the left shoulder, and tore upward through the heart and into the spine, bringing the beast down as decisively as you might bring down a flying bird.

Mike had used the Rigby he liked so much, the .275. I personally would have used the Holland and Holland express. But of course it's all a matter of taste.

THE END

Happy Relief From Painful Backache

Many of those gnawing, nagging, painful backaches people blame on colds or strains are often caused by tired kidneys—and may be relieved when treated in the right way.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(Adv.)

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Peanuts to You

Bubber busted a hole in the clean October afternoon air and sat down on the seat of his pants

By William R. Cox

Author of "Man Bites Champ," "The Gloves Hang High," etc.

It's my own fault. I could have been an insurance salesman, or maybe a truck driver. Instead of which I have to go and manage a ball team, and have a daughter that reads books, and— ahh, nuts! *Peanuts!*

IT IS a long way from March until October. When you have been carrying upon your back a ball club like the Panthers; when you have got Bubber Holt and Lefty Conover and twenty-two patched-up crackpots who have stumbled backwards into a pennant, you are not even glad to see October; not even with World Series dough staring you in the pocket.

Once I could have had a job in a manufacturing plant where they made screwdrivers. I should have taken it. It's my own fault I chose to be a baseball manager.

Bubber and Lefty were my own fault, too. Last year, with the club brok and the team wallowing in the second division, lower half, I took a scouting trip. I took it at my own expense, with Daisy along for the ride.

Daisy is my daughter. She is a very-fine looking girl, taking after her mama for blond hair and big blue eyes. She is inclined to be plump in certain places, which personally I think is swell, but which she thinks is very ungood, and Daisy spends most of the trip reading out of a set of little green books which were written by a guy who makes a speciality of thinning out women.

Daisy, also like her late beloved mama, does not care about baseball.

So there we were in Florida, where they play baseball in December. And there was Lefty Conover, of the Florida state, pitching a no-hit game for the Goody Woodies against the Centuro Astrianas in one of those "exhibition games."

Lefty is a handsome guy with wavy hair and narrow-set eyes and the usual southpaw disposition. But I signed him. I would sign a no-hit pitcher from the Epworth League. The Panthers have not got a no-hit pitcher from grammar school.

Daisy liked Lefty from the start. We hung around Tampa for a couple of weeks because Daisy clamored to go jooking with Lefty, and jooking was better for her than reading green books and starving on lettuce—I thought.

There is a couple of breweries in Tampa, and I have got a academic interest in breweries, so our stay was not unpleasant. It was down by the brewery that I discovered Bubber Holt.

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Thre was a pickup game. Bubber was batting. I drank my fifth beer and went outside and stared. It was unbelievable.

He was six and a half feet high, and he was almost as much through the middle. He had a face like a round cheese, with little bright pig eyes and eyebrows that always looked surprised. He was like a cartoon in the comics.

The pitcher threw the ball. Bubber turned on it. He was as delicate as a derrick. The bat he toted was heavy enough for a wagon pole. The ball socked against it and took far flight. It went over a couple of freight trains about a quarter-mile away. The game broke up.

Bubber came wallowing in. He had a gesture which was purely mechanical. His right hand went to a bag which he carried in his left hand. Blindly he selected a chocolate-covered peanut. The hand flipped, the goober went up, disappeared into his flytrap of a mouth. He never stopped the gentle, steady motion while I talked to him.

I said, "How much you weigh?"

"Two hundred and thirty," he said happily.

"You ever play ball in a league?"

"Yeah."

"Why'd you quit?"

Bubber grinned like a chimpanzee. "I make fifty bucks a week in the brewery, pal. Less union dues. Show me where baseball pays dough like that!"

I said, "Peoria will pay you seventy-five—on my say-so."

He looked very dubious. It took me four hours and twenty beers to sign him. Then, when he walked away, someone said, "Hey, Bubber! Keep this ball!" and tossed it to him underhanded. Bubber made a blind stab and dropped the pill.

I SHOULD have known then. It's my own fault. But the Panthers did not have a hitter who could knock one over second base on the fly. So I signed him.

So What happens? Lefty Conover comes up and wins twenty-seven games. Our other hurlers get excited and win enough to inch out the Reds for first place until late July. Then I send for Bubber.

From Peoria comes word he can't catch a pop fly in a basket. But also from Peoria comes his stick average; and it is merely .492 for clutch hitting.

So Bubber comes up and we find out Peoria still knows about fly-chasing. Bubber gets skulled twice in practice and I do not dare put him in the field. But I use him in the clutches with my customary shrewdness, and what with the good hurling I am getting, we win the flag by .0009 in a blanket finish.

So there we are in a World Series, and we have got about as much chance of licking the Sox as we had to win the pennant, which in April had been a 100 to 1 shot. And what do our whammy Panthers do? They win three straight from the Sox!

It ain't possible. But Bubber hits in every game. Lefty wins the opener. The Panthers, held together with wire and adhesive tape, do acrobatics, calisthenics and yogi. I am insane. The owners promise me a big raise if we cop the Championship.

Owners are like that. They are so surprised when we win the flag, they go around in a daze. But when they wake up, they demand a World Title. From the Panthers!

I stick Lefty in for the clincher. Lefty has been one of those dubious blessings, I might add right here. He is an Alibi Ike from away back. He has cluttered up my apartment all season, mooning with Daisy, who has gone back to her green books and diet, but seems to be able to take Lefty in her stride, too.

So I start Lefty, but before he goes into the box, he says to me, "I have got something on my mind, Mr. McDugal. I wish to discuss it with you."

I said, "Make sure you do not give Rowland a good ball, or I will discuss something with you which will be a nice, juicy fine."

Lefty winced. He likes money almost as well as he likes his left arm. He said, "But this is serious. Daisy is not doing—"

I roared, "Get out there and pitch!"

He went out and pitched. In the second inning he pitched to Billy Rowland. Billy hit one out of the lot. Red Torbert hit a double. Trix Beckett knocked a triple.

I GOT Lefty out of there, but it is all over. I sit on the bench alongside of Bubber Holt and groan, "I knew it would happen. It's my own fault. I should have taken that job with the pickle works!"

Bubber says, "We will get that other game. Do not worry, Mr. McDugal."

The Sox had four runs. In the eighth we get three on and I say, "Bubber! Hit one."

That is usually the signal for Bubber to bust one out of the park. He goes out and picks up a stick. There is something wrong with the way he handles himself. When I think about it, there has been something amiss with him all afternoon. I do not know what it is; but there is something.

Jay Coe is pitching for the Sox, and Jay is plenty good any day and especially today. Bubber waddles up and the fielders backtrack for the fences. Coe pitches his bravest curve, which Bubber has knocked all over the lot in the opening game of the Series.

Bubber swings like a gate. He comes around and sits down on the broad seat of his monkey suit. Strike one!

Coe blinks. He winds up and tosses a change of pace ball. Bubber closes his eyes. He swipes like a golfer in a sand trap. He misses it a foot. He sits down again.

Coe can't believe it. He fusses and fiddles. He rears back. He throws his swift for the corner. Bubber reaches into the next county and makes the complete circuit with the pole. Strike three!

I could not believe this. We lose the ball game, 4—0. I get Bubber and question him. He blinks, shakes his head and says, "I gues I had an off day, Mr. McDugal. I will get them tomorrow."

BUBBER did not get them tomorrow—nor the next day. The Sox won three straight in their turn. We came down to the eve of the seventh game. I left the park with Lefty Conover, not because I wanted to, but because he had finally caught up on me. I had ducked him since the day he wanted to speak to me about Daisy.

It has always been my policy to leave Daisy mind her own affairs. In fact, if I tried to mind Daisy's affairs, I would probably get the same thing I got when I tried to mind her mama's affairs. So I did not want to talk with Lefty Conover.

But he finally caught me, and I was so low I could not run, and anyway, he had to pitch the deciding game on the next day and I had to go over hitters with him.

We were almost out of the park, with me rehearsing each batter like Lefty was a child, which indeed he practically was, from the neck up, when he let out a yell.

"There they are! I knew it! That's what I been tryin' to tell you."

I looked and sure enough, there they were. Daisy and Bubber Holt were standing alongside an open taxicab door. While I watch, Daisy gives a little leap and flings herself at Bubber. He holds her as if she was a piece of balsam wood. They were as cuddly as a monkey and a polar bear.

Lefty screamed, "He stole my gal! The big, peanut-eatin' Romeo!"

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Bubber put Daisy down. He said with dignity, "I am not! I quit!"

"Looks like you just began," I said, watching Daisy blush.

"I mean eatin' peanuts," said Bubber angrily.

"I thought you meant getting base hits," I said meaningly. Then I got it. That was what had been different about Bubber. He had not been making that familiar gesture, that flipping motion of the right paw, which placed chocolate-covered peanuts into his mouth. . . .

Bubber was saying, "You know how many calories there is in one chocolate-covered peanut? Thousands. Maybe millions. Daisy knows. It's in the book."

"Daisy," I said bitterly, "should never have learned to read. It's my own fault for permitting it."

"You hush up!" said Daisy, always one to disrespect her elders. "I am helping your ball club. Bubber has lost three pounds since he stopped eating those nasty peanuts."

"You can start draining Lake Michigan with an eyedropper next week," I told her. But Lefty was screaming.

"You were supposed to be engaged t' me, Daisy McDugal! Now you won't even answer the phone. You're with that over-stuffed hunk of sausage every minute! You cannot do this to me, Daisy McDugal!"

Daisy said, "I was never engaged to you, Mr. Big Head Conover. I am engaged to Bubber—if he does not eat any more peanuts with chocolate covering."

Lefty moaned with anguish, but I said, "Since when has this been going on?"

"Since Monday," said Daisy proudly. "And after Bubber hits in the winning runs tomorrow we will get married."

I said, "Stop yowling, Lefty. The way this trambo is batting, they won't never get wed."

"Tomorrow," said Bubber, "I will personally murder this Coe! I will cream him."

BUT there was something missing. He had a look in his eye. He held tight to Daisy, almost seeming to lean on her; although if he had, she would have crumpled to a small mass of quivering flesh. Lefty howled, "He is a love pirate! She was engaged to me!"

I said, "Shut up, Lefty." I looked Bubber square in the eye. "You and Daisy are engaged. Okay, that is Daisy's hard luck. But there is another ball game in this Series. Let me tell you, Bubber, if you do not hit in this game, I will run you out of the business and back to the brewery. I will mark you lousy, and no one else will want you. Do you get that?"

Daisy said, "That would not deter us. Baseball! I have the greatest contempt for baseball."

I said, "Yeah. But do you know how much Bubber collected each week from the brewery?"

"Fifty bucks," said Bubber faintly. "Less union dues."

He eyed Daisy's silly hat, which he knew very well had set me back twenty bucks. He looked very thoughtful, or what would pass for thoughtful if he had anything to think with.

I said, "My daughter is twenty-four—"

"Twenty-one," said Daisy furiously.

"—and can marry anyone she chooses. Even a left-handed screwball or a brewery truck driver. But when she marries, she's on her own. No more dough from Pop."

Bubber said unconvincingly, "I will cripple this Coe. I will absolutely kill him."

Lefty yelled, "You could not buy a hit! You are an overstuffed piece of lousy furniture. . . ."

I said, "Break it up, or I will fine both of you a hundred."

Love is love, but to a ballplayer a hundred fish is his life's blood. They fell all over each other getting separated.

I could have gone into politics that time they wanted me to run for dog-catcher in Hohokus. But not me. Oh, no. I had to keep on managing ball clubs. It's my own fault.

IN OUR little apartment, Daisy was waiting for me. She was reading a red-covered book for a change. She said, "Bubber will be a great experiment. I believe I can pare him down about fifty pounds. He will look wonderful."

I said, "You will also look wonderful. Starved to death."

She said, "Baseball! The Series! The pennant! I'm sick of it. Is there nothing but a baseball where your heart ought to be, Daniel McDugal?"

"I hope so," I said.

I sat up almost all night, going over the Sox hitters, figuring how to send my men against Jay Coe. It was a bum idea. On paper, the Sox were twice as good as my Panthers.

I slept a little, then got up and went down to the stadium. It was too early, of course, and the place seemed haunted. Practically nobody was around. I wandered down to the hot dog stand trying to think that at least it was lucky we had the playoff game at home, but knowing it would make no difference if it was played in Alaska.

I was not hungry, but there was an empty space in my middle. Down at the stand I found Lefty Conover. He said,

"I—I couldn't stay away."

"Don't you eat any junk," I warned him.

"I—I ain't eatin'. "I—I'm all right."

I said, "You better be all right."

"Mister McDugal," he said, eyeing me strangely. "I love your daughter."

"So what?" I asked.

"All's fair in love or war, Mr. McDugal," he said firmly.

He turned and stalked away, listing slightly to port, like all those reedy left-handers. That was my key man, my winning pitcher!

I could not eat the hot dog. I left it and went up to my office. Daisy was ganging onto Bubber's arm. She said:

"Not one peanut, darling. You promised 'ittle Daisy."

He whined, "No, babyookins. Just for oo."

"Does oo love ittle ole Daisy?"

He swung her about like she was a doll, pecking at her and mauling her. I said, "For the love of Abner Doubleday will you stop that stuff? This is the seventh game of a World Series—"

"Go on, Bubber," Daisy said fondly. "Do what the old slave-driver wants. We'll have plenty of time."

"In the brewery," I said. "Get dressed, you big clown. Get ready for your sitting down exercises!"

"I will murder him," Bubber mumbled as he goes into the dressing room. "I will crucify that Coe."

Daisy told me a thing or two, then took her red-covered new book to the box. She could sit right there and read through any ball game. She inherited that, too. It would drive a sane man to drink.

IN A game like this one, a manager dies a thousand deaths. Twenty-eight hundred bucks per man, a big hunk of prestige, the old baseball itch to win—it's all there to make every play an agonizing event of greatest moment. The Sox were riding the crest. Eddie Trull, their manager, is a longtime personal enemy of mine, anyway. Jay Coe is hot.

Coe went right after us. In the early innings we did not get a loud foul off him. He was an easy-working right-hander with a free motion and speed to burn. I would give my whole staff, except Lefty, for Jay Coe.

Lefty, although he is pale and miserable-looking, does not go so bad, either. Our infield is sound as a dollar and makes a lot of fancy stops and the Sox do not threaten.

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After every inning Lefty would come stumbling in, his eyes fixed on the box above the bench, where Daisy is reading her little red book. But evidently she did not give him a tumble, because he looks pitiful right on.

Bubber was same on the end of the bench, out of the way of the real ballplayers. For three innings he sat there, not saying a word, looking as glum as Lefty. He had a glassy look around his eyes. He was about as much use as the water cooler behind which he crouched.

In the fourth he made a move which brought him from behind the cooler, but he still had the wobblies all over his ugly pan. The pitchers held and it was the ending of the fifth.

Buster Wiggin, who is our third hitter, got canny and looked over a curve which had slipped from Coe's hand. It was a three and two pitch and Buster was right. He walked.

Bubber inched over on the bench. He whispered hoarsely, "Lemme bat for Alec."

I said, "Are you nuts, too? Shut up!"

Alec, was the next best batter to Bubber. He played right field, and although he had been in a slump at the plate, I would as soon have taken out Lefty. Alec can field a streak.

Bubber said desperately, "I can finish in the field."

"The cops will lug you away if I ask 'em to," I told him. "Be quiet and I'll have you examined after the game."

Alec fouled out. I died again, for the hundredth time.

Bubber made a sound in his throat. I stared at him. He didn't even look at me. He was reaching inside his shirt. He took out a cellophane bag. In it were chocolate-covered peanuts.

Like a man in a trance, Bubber fingered out a peanut and flipped it into the air. Opening that mouth which was built to receive enormous slabs of pie, he clamped down on the goober.

I said, "Goodbye to romance," and turned back to the field to do a little more dying.

IN THE seventh they could have backed up the morgue wagon. The Sox got to Lefty. They put together two singles and a double. They made two runs.

Before I could get my breath to yank Lefty, he struck out the third man. He came in, trembling all over, but with his jaw set. He had moxie, all right. He said,

"They got luck hung all over them. That Rowland hit a bad ball. . . ."

"Rowland hit your pet swift," I snapped at him.

"What's two runs?" he said nobly. "We'll get 'em back." He was staring at Bubber. There was fire in Lefty's eyes.

Bubber was mechanically eating peanuts. I said, "Ye gods and little things! Peanuts! Screwballs! I am going absolutely batty."

"If we could get some hits," complained Lefty. Alec ain't hit one since the third game. Alec is our only hitter, anyway. Why can't. . ."

Halleck went up to the plate. He struck out. Coe was grinning. He had us in the palm of his mitt.

I looked at Bubber. He guiltily swallowed a peanut. I went out of my mind. I said, "Bubber!"

He stuck another peanut in his mouth. His eyes were unglazed. He said, "Me?"

"Not your brother!" I screamed. "This is not a clutch. No one is on. I am sending you to hit for Alec!"

He chewed the peanut. He said, "Now you are showing good sense, Mr. McDugal. I will cream him."

He went out for his bat. Lefty screamed, "You can't do that! Who will play right field?"

"Bubber!" I said.

"Mr. McDugal, do you feel all right?"

"Yes!" I said. "You want to make anything out of it?"

Bubber was carrying that piece of logwood he used for a bat. He did not look back at Daisy. He just went up to the plate, like a used mattress.

Coe must have thought I was crazy, too. He stared at our bench for a long minute. Then he tossed a couple of waste ones to get his bearings. Bubber stood there like a totem pole, watching with those little sharp eyes. Bubber had only one genius. He would not hit a bad ball.

Coe had to bend one over. He chose his Sunday curve. At least, it looked like his curve. Bubber came around with that magnificent swing.

He hit the curve before it got a chance to break. He almost got it on the nose. It rattled around in the center field slot, a triple for Lombardi, even.

Bubber got to second, which is pretty good running for him, at that.

I went out to coach third myself. Bubber was mighty pleased with himself. He strode off second and paid no attention to my frantic signs.

The second baseman darted over. I yowled. Coe wheeled and threw. Bubber flung himself down like an old rug. The second baseman caught him a foot off the bag.

I turned, ashen, and sat down on the grass. I saw Daisy, reading her book. I saw the crowd, standing, shaking a collective fist at me. Bubber went by me, muttering, "I can't understand it! I musta slipped, or somep'n."

Shaw hit a triple against the wall, which would have scored even Bubber. I died again. Nosey Porter struck out as Coe regained his form, retiring our side.

I SAID, "I am through. Finished! Bubber, go into right field and disgrace us completely. At least I will not have to welcome you into my family."

"You can't do that!" Lefty howled. "How can I pitch with that peanut-gobblin' fumble-fingers out there? He'll toss the game away."

"You can't kill a dead dog," I told him. "Go out there and throw before I find you a brewery job, too."

At that, I was playing percentages. Alec was in a horrible slump. I had only a rookie green as grass and a one-legged veteran—and Bubber. Dying men clutch at straws. Maybe no one would hit into right field. Maybe when Bubber came up again someone would be on.

Lefty was unsettled. He tried to pitch low and inside to Torbert. He pitched low and outside. Torbert nailed it on the button.

The ball went on a line between first and second. It hit against the right field bleacher wall.

Playing them off the boards was something we had not even tried to teach our Bubber. He plunged like a charging elephant to take the rebound. He went, of course, in the wrong direction. Wiggin had to run all the way over from center to make the play. Torbert slid into third.

Lefty tried, but his morale was shot. He had to serve a good one to Beckett. The Sox hitter poked it over second for a single. Torbert scored the Sox's third run. Lefty started beating himself on the head and it took the whole infield to make him stop in time to save his few brains.

I went back to my dying. I was making a career out of these death bed scenes. The infield got into action and knocked down screaming liners to retire the Sox for Lefty. He came in screaming, "I told you so! I told you he would do it!"

"What were you throwing those guys, beanbags?" I said. "Blame yourself for something once in a while."

"How can I pitch with that monstrosity in right field?"

"How can you pitch—period," I said.

"You're sticking up for him! You and Daisy—"

"Daisy don't even know a ball game's going on," I said. "Forget Daisy and everything else but pitching."

Bubber sat on the bench and ate peanuts. He had a second bag, I saw. Somehow or other he looked happier.

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He had the look of a man who has come to the crossroads, made his decision, and is about to go forward in full confidence. He mouthed a goober and said:

" 'At's right, Lefty. Play ball and forget about women."

Lefty was too stunned to talk back. He went back and pitched, too. In the last of the ninth he had held the Sox to their three runs and we had last licks.

OF COURSE we did not have any runs. The customers were filing toward the exits. Tex Braley led off for us.

I stayed on the bench to do my dying in private. Coe was still working along. He threw a fine curve. Tex closed his eyes and slugged. The ball went skipping past short. It was a hit!

I crawled forward, straining my eyes. Coe pitched to Halleck. I watched his arm. He threw his swift for a strike, but the arm drooped a little. I passed the sign for Halleck to wait it out.

Halleck walked. Eddie Trull had not noticed Coe's arm, I was sure. I clenched my hands.

There was a crunching sound in my ear. Bubber's voice, thick with chocolate peanuts, said, "I'll cream him! I'll murder him!"

Buster walked, filling the sacks. People came back into the stands, falling all over one another. Daisy looked up from her red book, saw Bubber going up to the plate and smiled sweetly.

Bubber ate one last peanut. Trull was bellowing at Coe to come out. Jay stood a moment, staring at the sky. Then he put the ball carefully down on the mound and strolled toward the clubhouse. He was a game, cool guy.

Caxton came in. Caxton is a left-hander with smoke and control, a very fine elbower. Lefty kept moaning in my ear, "Caxton struck Bubber out in the fourth game! He has got his number. I shouldn't of done it, I know I shouldn't."

I clamped down on his left wrist. I said, "You shouldn't have done what?"

Lefty said, "That's my salary wing, Mr. McDugal!"

"You won't need it. What did you do?"

"Peanuts," moaned Lefty weakly. "Don't break my wrist, Mr. McDugal. All's fair in love and war."

I said, "What about peanuts?"

"I—I planted them on him," said Lefty. "Daisy— she won't marry him, now. He ate them. You saw him eatin' them. Even goin' up to bat he ate one. She'll see him. I put them in his locker, in his pants pocket. . ."

I said, "That's what you were buying at the hot dog stand! Well, I'll be abso-bloody-damn-lutely whacked!"

Caxton unwound that steam. It was a close one, over the inside corner. Bubber let it go. The umpire called it a strike. Bubber looked around, disapproving. The umpire waggled his fingers at him. Bubber shrugged.

Caxton was on top. He wasted one. Bubber sighed and set himself. The three base-runners cavorted. I yowled like a maniac. Lefty sat back and looked ill.

Caxton wound up. He threw again. It was a fine smoking, speed-ball. It went down there like an express train.

Bubber took the bat off his shoulder. He came around with it. He blasted a hole in the clean, October afternoon air. He sat down on the seat of his pants, facing the dugout.

I COULD hear Daisy's voice above the crowd yells. She screaming, "Hit it, ittle ole babykins! Hurry up, darling! Finish ole ball game so Daisy can go to movies!"

Bubber blinked. He got up and beamed. He nodded to Daisy, bowed at the crowd, at Caxton. He set himself.

Caxton threw the high hard one again. It was just as good as the one Bubber had missed. It was a pitch to end any ball game, a pitch no hurler can throw more than four, five times during a game, a pitch with everything on it.

Bubber inclined like the Eiffel Tower, not swiftly, but with dignity. He had rhythm in that swing. He had wood enough to start a conflagration in that big bat.

The ball came like a little white bird. It struck against Bubber's stick. It went flying back, a beautiful, soaring songbird from the southland. It went to hell and gone over the head of the Sox center fielder, who ran, then stopped running and wept.

It went right out of the ball park. It was the longest homer I have ever seen in the ball park. It was the most beautiful homer I have ever seen in my life.

It was the ball game.

I WAS in the bedroom of our apartment. I was ready to go out and let the home town admire me. I felt like nine milion dollars, ready cash.

I knew when Bubber came in, because a piece of furniture fell over with a great clatter. Bu I did not care. Daisy began billing and cooing and Bubber rumbled his very foolish answers, but still I did not care. Then there was a loud voice:

"You did not tell her, eh? You are a rat, huh? You would not confess!"

That was Lefty. He had been to too many movies, I guess. His voice was deep and accusing.

Bubber said, "So all right. So I'll tell her!"

"You're chance is gone, now." Lefty was really acting. He was both Barrymores together. He was terrific. I tied my necktie and listened. "I will tell her myself. Daisy, this man—"

Daisy said, "You talk so funny! What's the matter with you, Lefty? Have you been drinking beer again?"

Lefty's voice ran into a higher register. "I don't drink beer! I just wanta tell you that this big blubberhead has spent the entire afternoon eatin' chocolate-covered peanuts!"

I whistled a little tune I made up on the spur of the moment. If I knew women, this would get Lefty nowhere with Daisy. It might fix Blubber, but it would do Lefty no good whatsoever. I was in clover. I was Lucky Dan McDugal, without a ballplayer for a son-in-law.

Bubber said, "Somebody left the damn things in my locker. I meant t' tell you, Daisy, honest I did!"

Lefty said, "He deceived you!"

There was a moment's silence.

Daisy said, "It's nothing at all, darling Bubber."

"What?" Lefty was agonized to the soul. "You said if he ate peanuts—I mean, it's in the book. . ."

I went to the doorway of the room. Daisy picked up the little red-covered book. She said:

"Oh that! I got another book, now. On page 67, it says that peanuts are sound, nutritious food. It says that if you eat an apple at night, before retiring, peanuts are of great value, and the apple, it says, does away with the harm which might accrue from the peanuts, it says."

Lefty said, "Daisy!" Then he snapped his jaw together. He said, "So! You change books, even. Very well, Daisy. I am glad that I learned in time. Daisy, you are a—a—"

Bubber got up out of an overstuffed chair and said, "What is she?"

Lefty said, "Aw nuts! *Peanuts!*" and ran out.

I said, "Well, Bubber? What are you looking so unhappy about?"

The big face was dolorous, the fat cheeks sagging. He looked from me to Daisy, then at the walls. He said, "I hate apples. They are bad for my indigestion."

. . . It's my own fault. I could have been an insurance salesman. I could have been in the ice business, in Elmira, one time. I could even have stayed a bachelor.

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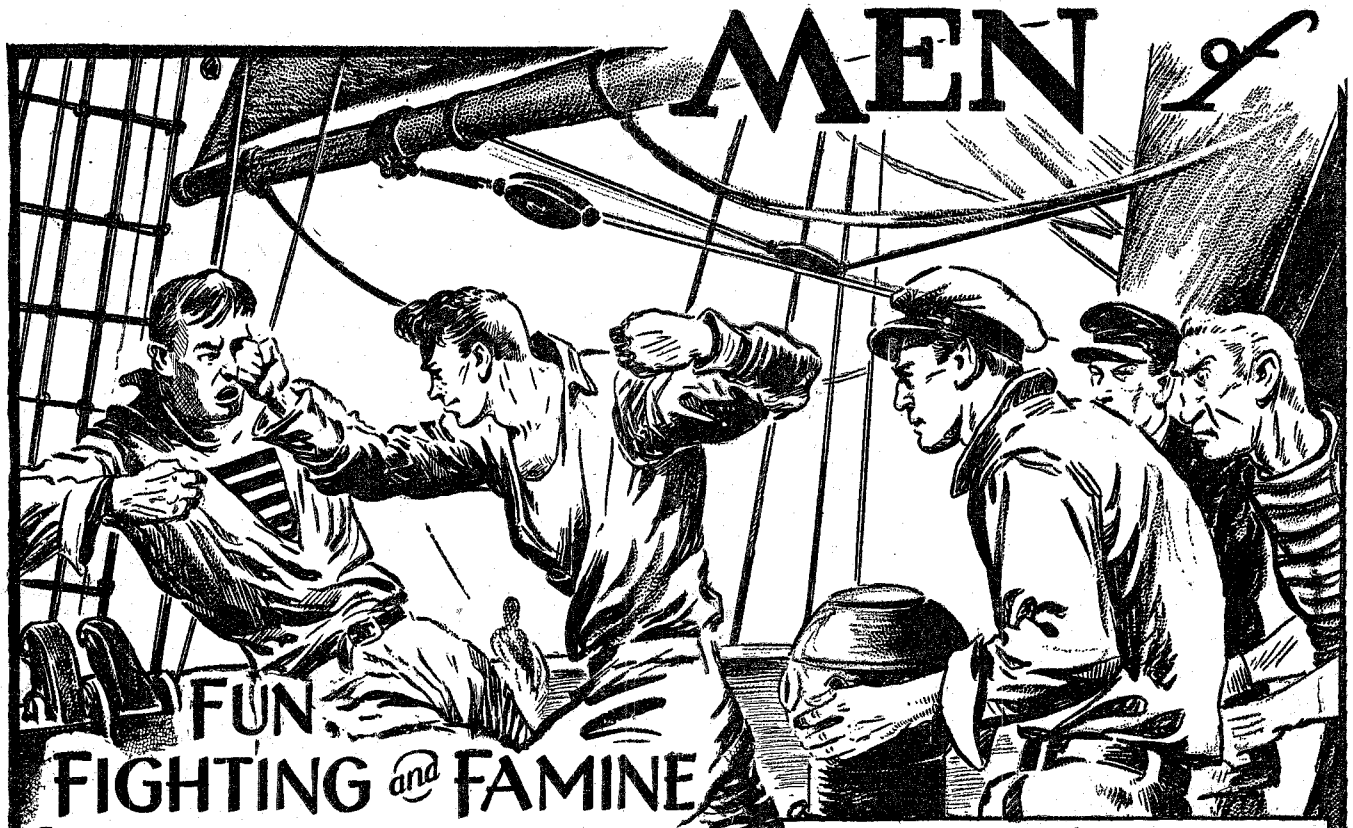
MEN



FUN, FIGHTING and FAMINE

IN 1916, A FIERY RED-HEAD OF 19 RAN AWAY FROM WESLEYAN COLLEGE AND SIGNED A COVENANT WITH ADVENTURE — ADVENTURE THAT LED HIM OVER A LONG AND STRANGE TRAIL. CHARLEY VEIL SAILED ON AN OLD CARGO SHIP FOR THE ARGENTINE — BATTLED A CREW RAW WITH LIQUOR AND LICKED THE BEST OF THEM — STOLE THE SKIPPER'S GROG CHEST AND PAID FOR IT BY BEING DRAGGED HALFWAY THROUGH THE CARIBBEAN AT THE END OF A LINE!

HE BECAME A GAUCHO AND LEARNED TO TOSS THE BOLAS AND FIGHT WITH A KNIFE. THE LATTER KNOWLEDGE WAS TO BENEFIT HIM LATER.

A GREAT HAND WITH THE LADIES, HE SURVIVED TWO KNIFE FIGHTS CAUSED BY JEALOUS SEÑORITAS. STORIES OF THE WORLD WAR FOUND THEIR WAY TO VEIL'S EARS AND HE WAS SOON ON HIS WAY TO JOIN THE LAFAYETTE ESCADRILLE. "THAT CRAZY CHARLIE VEIL", THEY CALLED HIM. THE RED-HEAD MADE A GREAT FLYER. FLYING A PLANE WITH A LARGE 13 ON THE FUSELAGE, HE WON THE CROIX DE GUERRE WITH PALMS, AGAIN, AGAIN AND YET AGAIN!

A True Story in Pictures

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DARING

by STOOKIE ALLEN

HE DOWNED OBSERVATION PLANES, PURSUITS AND BALLOONS. ONCE HE EVEN "JOINED" A PATROL OF 9 FOKKERS, FLEW RIGHT INTO THEIR MIDST AND DOWNED 2 BEFORE HE WAS SENT CRASHING INTO THE FOREST OF COMPIÈGNE, BADLY INJURED. THAT NIGHT FROM THE EIFFEL TOWER WAS FLASHED THE BULLETIN OF THE END OF PLANE NO. 13.

VEIL BARELY GETS HOME IN CRIPPLED PLANE (1918)

Charles H. VEIL

GENERAL PETAIN SAW THE FIGHT WITH HIS GLASSES AND DECORATED "THE WILD INDIAN."

WITH A BROKEN JAW AND A HOLE IN HIS GROIN HE WAS SOON BACK FIGHTING. HE CELEBRATED THE ARMISTICE WITH TOO MUCH BRANDY, BARELY ESCAPED COURT MARTIAL FOR FLYING HIS PLANE THROUGH THE ARC DE TRIOMPHE! LATER, HE FLEW TYPHUS SERUM INTO POLAND, JOINED THE AIR FORCE AND HELPED POLAND ROUT THE BOLSHEVIKI. MARRIED INTO THE FRENCH NOBILITY. OPENED A CASINO AT NICE AND DRANK UP THE PROFITS. ESTABLISHED AN AIR LINE, PARIS TO WARSAW, (THE FIRST AIR LINE IN EUROPE). AFTER THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION HE WAS PUT IN CHARGE OF THE WORST FAMINE AREA AND FOUGHT OFF BANDITS TRYING TO TAKE FOOD MEANT FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

LOUIS BREGUET AND VEIL WITH THE PLANE FURNISHED FOR PARIS TO WARSAW LINE.

IN THE GRECO-TURKISH WAR HE FLEW THE ONLY PLANE IN THE TURK AIR FORCE AND BLEW UP THE SMYRNA BRIDGE. REDS WERE TRYING TO ORGANIZE IN TUNIS. BECAUSE HE KNEW MANY RED PLOTTERS HE WAS ASKED TO PUT THE FINGER ON THEM BY THE FRENCH SÛRETÉ....

...THE WORK CALLED FOR HIM TO GO INTO THE CAFE HANGOUT OF THE REDS IN DISGUISE. THIS GOT HIM IN ANOTHER FREE FOR ALL KNIFE FIGHT IN WHICH HE WAS RESCUED BY THE SÛRETÉ BARELY IN TIME.

RECENTLY HE AND A PAL HAVE BEEN DRILLING FOR GOLD IN THE SIERRAS HIS ONLY CONTACT WITH CIVILIZATION BEING AN OCCASIONAL TRIP TO HOLLYWOOD WHEN A WILD MAN OR A WILD IDEA IS NEEDED.

Coming soon: General Freyberg—Warrior, Athlete, Adventurer

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No Spurs, No Gun

By George Michener

Author of "As We Grow Older," etc.

The days move slowly and without changes in the cowlands, and it's easy for a veteran to forget how quickly a kid becomes a man. And it's dangerous to forget . . .

THIS, David thought, is a hangover! His brain throbbed and bulged against the iron-tight compression of his skull. His stomach coiled and uncoiled queasily; his mouth was an abomination.

The sideboard of David's bunk resounded to the rhythmic beat of a boot. Old Hank Tooky's gravel voice besought David to arise:

"Get up, get up. Tom wants to see you. Get up, get up."

David opened an eye. Sunlight, streaming through the bunkhouse window, stabbed him deep and he closed the eye, pushed his face into the smothering darkness of the pillow. Unwelcome recollection, blurred in a spectral gray, confronted him.

David had met Tom Ingersol when he returned to the ranch last night. Tom was David's foster-father and he didn't hold with drinking—not for boys. David, in Tom's opinion, was still a boy. This was an error which David had resolved to correct. Today!

Today David was going to have it out with Tom Ingersol, man to man. But not just now. Now he yearned only for peace and quiet.

Hank Tooky's boot resumed its devilish tattoo. "Davie! Tom wants to see you. Get up, get up, get up. . . ."

David Harney's lank, seventeen-year-old body remained motionless, embalmed in misery. He wished Hank Tooky would die. He tried desperately to recapture the sweetness of oblivion.

Hank Tooky changed tactics. "Fetch him, Gen'al!"

General was Hank's dog. He was part English Shepherd and part speculation. The result was large, shaggy and formidable.

David felt a damp nose probing beneath his cheek. Inch-long fangs clamped about his wrist and gently tugged. David raised his head. "Lemme alone!" he shrilled.

David's inflamed face, his bleary eyes plainly were a shock to Hank. He recoiled a step. "Better pile out," he advised mildly. "Tom wants to see you. Let him go, Gen'al."

Smallish, warped and sparrow-legged from years in the saddle, Hank Tooky stumped toward the door. General released his grip and padded after him. David dropped back on the pillow.

The sun climbed and the bunkhouse grew warm. David stirred cautiously. He sat up on the edge of the bunk and held his head. Today was Sunday, day of rest. Morning of pain and remorse. The connotation of maturity in his pain somewhat tempered David's remorse. He spoke thickly and gruffly, an authoritative voice in an otherwise empty bunkhouse:

Cautiously, careful to make no sound, David beckoned General away from the house to clear the way for thieving hands

"Man!" he said. "It's sappin' your strength."

He crossed to the drinking pail, plunged his head in the water, ears deep, and drank.

Since David had neglected to remove his clothes the night before, his morning toilet was brief. He telescoped the top of a riding-boot into a climbing jeans leg, screwed around his shirt so the buttons were properly aligned in front and mopped his face on the roller towel. He ran a comb through his dripping, sandy hair and rescued a three-gallon hat from the floor. Then, jamming on the hat and thrusting his nose to within six inches of the shaving mirror, he studied his reflection.

The shaving mirror had its imperfections, and also its virtues. By moving back a careful few inches David's bony but not unusual features assumed, in the glass, a

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crushed, bull-dog ferocity. The sail tendency of his ears was minimized and slightly scalloped. His jaw became prominent and brutish.

David narrowed his pale eyes and thinned his mouth. A knuckled forefinger caressed his upper lip. He spoke again, ominously:

"Tom," he said, "a man can stand so much. I'm leavin'. I'm tellin' you, man to man, before I go I want an accounting."

Still squinting, still wistfully stroking his lip, David turned from the mirror. His stomach was easier now and his head pained no more than enough to put an edge to his temper. He gulped down another pint of water, squared his shoulders and strode to the door. He was, he thought hopefully, in an ugly mood.

TOM INGERSOL had visitors this morning. Two saddled horses waited by the ranch office. General sat in the open doorway, his ears pricked and his plumed tail waving David a courteous greeting.

David's purposeful tread changed to a saunter. The ranch office, an annex to Tom Ingersol's loghouse, had a bench before it. David flopped down there and critically appraised the two saddlers. One, a big blaze-faced dun, he recognized as belonging to Captain Murdock, the cattle buyer. General came out and laid his head on David's knee, closing his eyes as David kneaded spread, stiffened fingers into his gray ruff.

In the office Captain Murdock was telling a story, a story that ended in a boom of laughter from Captain Murdock and a cackle from Hank Tooky. Captain Murdock's companion didn't laugh—not that David heard—nor did Tom Ingersol. Tom's was a Puritanic heritage and his reaction to stories—Captain Murdock's kind of stories—was negative. Captain Murdock, undaunted, repeated the snapper of the story and laughed again.

Tom Ingersol austerely cleared his throat. "It's too bad," he said, "about Jed Hilton's stuff. He counted on those steers running twenty, thirty pounds more."

"There's the weight sheets they sent me from Chicago," answered Captain Murdock in a sobered voice. "Checked at the stockyard scales by an Association man."

Hank Tooky was Tom Ingersol's foreman and he spoke with knowledge. "You can't," he said, "take in yearlin' feeders and make 'em pay. Not around here. They wintered all right—Jed had plenty o' slough hay—but spring's too late. He couldn't get 'em on grass long enough before shippin' time to make the weight."

"It's too bad," said Tom again. "Hank and I warned him, but Jed's not what I'd call a provident man."

David, on the bench outside, laughed hollowly and silently. He, too, like Jed Hilton's steers, had been taken in—a yearling of thirteen—and fattened to a profitable size. Even the feed had cost Tom Ingersol nothing. Nine hundred dollars David Harney's father left when he died had footed the bill. The analogy gave David a morbid satisfaction. Tom, he guessed, considered himself a provident man. He's made his feeder pay.

Conversation in the office had ceased. David heard the little iron safe close with an air-cushioned thud and a whirr of the combination. Then he heard Tom slide out the bottom drawer of his roll-top desk, heard the gurgle of a bottle and a rattle of cups.

David's stomach stirred sluggishly.

General yawned, left David and stalked into the office.

Old Hank Tooky suddenly spoke. "That dawg," he said, "is the tanglin'est critter I ever see! Lookit them tushes! No man alive can walk in this office while Gen'al's watchin' it. Here, boy. See this? Watch it! All right, Cap, now try 'n' make a move toward Tom's safe."

"Not this chicken!" declared Captain Murdock. "Well, here goes the dust-cutter. Lookin' at you, gentlemen!"

"Luck, Captain," toasted Tom Ingersol.

Captain Murdock's companion murmured politely, and Hank Tooky barked: "Powder River!"

There followed the clatter of emptied cups. The four men moved to the door.

Captain Murdock came out first, stocky and florid-cheeked and with his great nugget watch-chain gleaming bravely against his alpaca vest. He spoke distantly to David and went on to his horse, smacking and wiping his lips.

David knew Captain Murdock, but his companion was a stranger, a spare, loose-jointed man, range dressed and with a long, sad face and dark, sad eyes. At sight of David seated so near and listening by the office door the sad-faced man turned questioningly to Hank.

"Davie's all right," said Hank Tooky and he jerked his thumb toward Tom Ingersol behind him. "His kid."

The sad-faced man nodded as if reassured and in the softest voice he said to Tom Ingersol: "I didn't know you had a son."

Tom stood stiffly quiet in the doorway, his thin, stern features constrained, his level, humorless gaze boring into David. "Adopted," he answered finally.

"He has good hands," said the sad-faced man.

He said it drearily and sorrowfully, as though he had no hands of his own at all, although he did have—lean, strong, beautifully tapering hands. And his eyes, now that David got a close look at them, were the strangest David ever had seen—clear and deep and darkly illumined. "My boy," said the sad-faced man, "you have good hands. That's something you must never forget."

"Yes, sir," said David, somewhat confused. "No, sir, I won't forget."

The sad-faced man joined Captain Murdock by the horses and together they rode on.

David looked down at his hands and then at Hank. "Hank, who was that man?" he asked.

"That," said Hank, "was Harry Pelven 'n' he's finished more badmen than you can count on your fingers. He usta be a Ranger."

"Come in here, David," said Tom Ingersol.

Hank stumped off toward the corrals, and David arose.

THE wait on the bench had had a subduing influence upon David. He entered the office reluctantly. General, lying by the little iron safe, thumped his tail, and David snapped his fingers at him. Then, uneasily, David looked at Tom.

There was no kinship between David and Tom. Tom had been his father's friend, nothing more. David's mother had died when he was five, and his father—*John Harney, Feed and Gen. Mdse.*—when he was thirteen. Since then David had lived with Tom.

Tom had demanded no affection from David, only discipline, the hard, strict discipline of a man whose life has been one of self-imposed discipline. A bachelor and ranch owner, Tom had achieved modest prosperity by work, thrift and foresight. He believed that prosperity gained in any other way was ephemeral and worthless. Also, he believed in Heaven and Hell.

That much David understood about the graying, dour man who had been his father's friend. More than that—what compromise, if any, Tom's philosophy embraced—David understood not at all. Today, as always, Tom's speech to David was a model of directness:

"David," he said, "is it your idea that I have treated you badly? That I have worked you too hard?"

David felt a flush creep into his cheeks. "I don't know," he mumbled. "I don't remember what I said last night."

Tom was standing by the roll-top desk. His fingers

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started a gentle drumming. He spoke more slowly, as if his thoughts were charting a course through a strange and perilous channel. "You are getting older," he said. "Maybe I hadn't quite realized. . . Who gave you that whisky last night?"

David sullenly shook his head. "I forget."

Tom turned and gazed out the window. David watched him, faintly baffled. For the first time he was seeing Tom undecided, hesitant.

Suddenly David remembered anew all the wrongs he had suffered. He remembered the nine hundred dollars his father had left when he died and which Tom Ingersol had appropriated. He remembered those dark winter mornings when Tom mercilessly had routed him out of bed to fill the wood-box before breakfast and the freezing, seven-mile ride to school, the interminable and staggering list of chores to be performed when he returned from school.

He thought of the numerous thrashings Tom had given him, thrashing for poor school work, for disobedience, for swearing, for smoking, for forgetting once to feed and water a horse after a hard day's ride—a really memorable thrashing, that last one! Bitterly he thought of the work he was doing now, a man's work and at half the pay Tom was giving the rest of his riders. A man working for a boy's wages!

David clenched his fists. "Tom, I'm leavin'," he said.

Tom turned from the window. "No," he contradicted. "You aren't leaving this office until I tell you to."

Tom's voice was calm, the dogged calm of a man who has come to a disagreeable decision. "David," he said, "until you are a grown man I want you to do no drinking. I've told you that before. After this you may remember better."

Tom was unbuckling his heavy cow-hide belt. David watched the belt slide out through its loops.

Tom raised his arm. "David," he said, "turn around."

DAVID'S hand moved. He saw his fingers grip the belt and tear it from Tom's grasp and fling it upon the floor. It lay there, the belt, a limp and damning thing, the buckle brightly gleaming, and David stared down at it, aghast. The seconds ticked by, and David couldn't breathe. Slowly he lifted his gaze.

Tom's cheeks were pale. He wasn't looking at David, but at some point remote beyond David's shoulder. He spoke flatly, lifelessly. "I've made a mistake," he said.

David took a backward step. "I'm leavin'!" he cried thickly. "I mean I'm leavin' for good! 'N' you can't stop me! You ain't my guardian! You ain't nothin' to me—legal."

Tom kept staring past David's shoulder. "I should have realized . . ." he said. "I should have given it more thought." He bowed his head as if in melancholy cogitation. He seemed humbled and old. A gray-haired old man of sixty with his pride humbled and crushed.

Contrition stirred in David. Generously enough he said: "I can't blame you, Tom, for tryin' to get all the work out of a man that you can. That's the way the world is. And you can't hold it against me because I want that money Dad left me when he—"

"You'll get that when you're twenty-one." Tom bent down to pick up his belt.

"You mean you won't give me my money now? It's my—"

"No! Not one penny of it. That's final."

And, dismally, David knew that it was final.

Tom had straightened. He no longer seemed humbled or so old. His steel-blue eyes explored David's mind chillingly and thoroughly. "David," he inquired sternly, "who put you up to this? Who were you with last night?"

"It don't make no difference who I was with. I'm leavin', and you can't stop me!"

Tom had bowed his head again, threading his belt back through its loops. Mildly he said: "I won't try to stop you."

"I'm goin' to Texas! I'm never comin' back!"

"Goodbye, David."

"Goodbye, Tom."

David left the office with a feeling of frustration. Tom had not reacted exactly as he had anticipated. Nor, in retrospect, did his own stand seem so heroic. He should have been more insistent about the money.

He looked back defiantly. "It's my money!" he said. But he did not say it loudly, and the office doorway remained vacant. "You'll see!" muttered David. "Damn' ol' slave-driver!" Scowling, he scuffed his way through the dust to the bunkhouse.

In the bunkhouse David went torpidly about preparations for his departure. He spread his slicker on the floor and atop it he dropped blankets and a helter-skelter of shirts, socks and drawers. He rolled the whole into a bundle and tucked it under his arm. He tiptoed to the doorway and looked out.

No one was in sight. David ducked around the corner of the bunkhouse and walked swiftly toward the barn.

THREE hours later, by riding devious trails, David had arrived at a small corral set lonesomely in a fold of the foothills. Here he was facing the reproachful gaze of a young man with sideburns, a wide-brimmed beaver hat and a beautiful silky-black mustache.

"But I *did* ask him!" David was explaining earnestly. "I told him straight from the shoulder that I wanted my mo—"

"You didn't mention my name, did you?"

"No, I didn't. Honest I didn't, Stew!"

Stew's eyes were brooding and disappointed. "Kid," he said, "you've let me down." He began rolling a cigarette.

In unhappy silence David finished unsaddling his horse. He closed the corral gate and tossed in a couple armfuls of feed and moved back to where Stew was standing moodily by a corral post.

Stew Harney, older than David by twelve years, was David's uncle and he had traveled much. Indeed, he had done little else in his life. He wore a pearl-handled gun and silver-inlaid spurs, and David always had admired him greatly.

For as long as David could remember, Stew had been turning up unexpectedly for a visit of a week or so with David's father. Once, soon after David had gone to live with Tom Ingersol, Stew had turned up there, too. His stay had been brief, just long enough for a meal and a trenchant interview with Tom. Since then, when sojourning in these parts, Stew would shack-up with a local horsebreaker known as Dough-god Rottles. It was at Dough-god's place that David now had joined Stew.

Stew and David—they had made their plans last night—were leaving for Texas. Stew knew of a little cow-spread for sale along the Red River—or was it the Pecos? Stew had mentioned both rivers, so David wasn't quite certain—where free range was unlimited all the way to the Guadalupe Mountains. A fine, rolling grassland and two hustling partners like Stew and David could make their fortunes. Providentially—or so it had seemed last night—all that was needed to swing the deal was nine hundred dollars.

Stew was gloomy over David's failure to get the nine hundred from Tom. David was gloomy, too, but he wanted Stew to have no slightest doubt about his fighting spirit. He slapped his uncle on the back.

"Cheer up, partner!" he cried. "They can't keep us Harneys down! We'll have that money in no time. All we gotta do is to catch on with some Texas cattle outfit and save our wages."

The prospect, instead of lessening Stew's gloom, ap-

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peared only to add irritation. He spat out his cigarette, scowled and strode off toward Dough-god's little one-room shack on the slope above.

David, after some hesitation, followed Stew.

Stew entered Dough-god's shack; so did David.

Dough-god Rottles, like Tom Ingersol, was a bachelor. There noticeable resemblance ended. Dough-god was a man who inclined to the by-ways rather than the highways, the shadows rather than the sunlight, whiskers in preference to soap and water. At the moment of David's entrance Dough-god was lying on the flat of his back in his bunk and fixedly regarding the ceiling. Now, with a minimum of effort and hospitality, Dough-god propped himself on his elbow and transferred his bag-eyed gaze to his guests.

David waved a genial hand. "Hiyuh, Dough-god ol' timer!"

Dough-god swiveled his disconcerting eyes toward Stew and back to David.

A bit self-consciously David tried again: "Dough-god, you should've been with us last night. Did Stew tell you about it? I met him over town and we stopped at the Palace for a few dust-cutters. You'd have died laughin' if you'd heard Stew stringin' that French girl there. Ha! Ha! How about it, Stew? Heh, heh. . . "

David's laughter was not infectious. Dough-god returned his sphinx-like attention to Stew.

Stew said out of the corner of his mouth: "No dice. And don't keep starin' at me, you whisker-faced baboon." He sat down at Dough-god's grease-stained table and began gathering up a scattered deck of playing cards.

David spoke quickly and soothingly. "Cards are all right. We don't need dice. I know a couple good three-handed games."

"The hell you do!" exploded Dough-god. Then, shaking his head as if it were all too much for his comprehension, he flopped over on his back again and resumed his study of the ceiling.

Stew, frowning intently, shuffled and re-shuffled the cards.

David perched upon the edge of a bench. He spoke timidly in the growing silence. "Stew," he asked, "what's it mean if a man says you have good hands?"

"It depends on who said it." Stew let the pack run through his fingers. "If a gambler said it—Who was it? Was it about me?"

"It was a friend of Captain Murdock's. He was with him today—"

"Cap Murdock! At Tom's today?" Stew put down the cards.

David nodded. "This mornin'. He and this other man—"

David cast a startled glance toward the bunk. Dough-god had come to life; his bristly countenance was up and peering.

Stew's chair scraped along the floor. "I'm goin' to take a turn outside. Come on, Davie." He gripped David's arm.

STEW led David a little distance from the shack and confronted him sternly. "Davie, you shouldn't have mentioned Cap Murdock in there. Tom handles beef shipments for half a dozen of these little outfits. Didn't Cap leave money with Tom this mornin'?"

"I—I guess so. Anyway, I heard Tom close the safe when—" David widened his eyes. "You don't trust Dough-god?"

Stew snapped his fingers. "Not that much! You've got to remember to watch your tongue, Davie. Like last night in the Palace when you were braggin' you knew the combination to Tom's safe. What was it you said? Two, eight, four. . . ."

"Three, six, two, nine, seven," David murmured. His brow furrowed. "Stew, I don't remember tellin' you that."

"Suppose someone had overheard you last night."

"Gosh, Stew! D'you think anyone did?"

Stew's teeth flashed in a quick smile. "I guess not. Don't take it so hard, Davie. Come on, let's sit down and forget it."

They sat down together on a rock, David humbled yet warmed with the knowledge that somehow the camaraderie, the boon companionship, of the previous night had been restored. He glanced sidewise at his uncle. "Stew, when are we pullin' out for Texas? Tonight?"

Stew got out his tobacco and papers. "I don't know," he replied gently. "If you'd got that money like you promised—Now I may have to hole up here with Dough-god a while. I'm sorry, Davie, but you can see how it is."

"Sure," David. He grinned. "I don't blame you at all, Stew. Not at all." He clasped his hands over his knee and gazed at yonder hillside. His cheeks felt stiff and unnatural, and slowly he relaxed his grin.

Stew struck a match. "Who all was at the ranch, Davie?"

David swallowed. "No one. Just Tom and Hank. The Hender boys went over to the flats to help their old man for a week, and Snowball's away, too, till tomorrow. Hank's doin' the cookin' today, I guess." David kept his gaze on the hillside. "It's funny," he added, "but I guess I forgot to eat today. Forgot it, I guess. . ."

"That mutt of Tooky's likes you pretty good, does he?"

David nodded. "He'll kinda miss me, I guess."

"Suppose, Davie, I showed you how to collect that money."

David turned. "You mean sue, Tom? I wouldn't want to—"

"I mean collect it. Take it."

"Take it?" David gave a start. "You mean—"

"No, I don't mean steal it. The money is yours. How can we steal something when it belongs to us already?"

David opened his mouth, but he had no answer.

Stew was smiling and his black, steady eyes were crinkling at the corners. "Davie," he asked, "do I look like a crook? Do you really think that of old Uncle Stew?"

"Gosh, no, Stew! Gosh! It's just—just—Well, how did you mean to—to collect it?"

"You know how to open Tom's safe, don't you? And the mutt won't bother you. We'll take the nine hundred—just what's comin' to us and not a cent more." Stew paused. "Well?"

David could feel his cheeks beginning to burn. "I couldn't, Stew," he said weakly. "I—I—"

Stew shrugged. "I thought," he murmured, "that a Harney would always stand up for his right."

"I will stand up for my rights! It's only that—"

"Then what're you scared of?"

"I ain't scared!"

"Maybe," Stew muttered to himself, "it's a good thing poor John died when he did. If he'd ever lived to see a Harney and a son of his show the white feather. . ."

Silent and miserable, David stared down at his clasped hands.

Stew arose and flipped away his cigarette.

"Stew."

"Well?" Stew looked at David coldly.

"Stew, I—Stew, roll me a smoke, will you?"

Stew reached in his pocket, and suddenly he was smiling. He sat down again.

AT MIDNIGHT Stew and David were standing by the corner of Tom Ingersol's barn. Their horses were tied in the creek brush beyond the out-buildings.

David's stomach was pursed into a tight little ball, his armpits were wet and he held his mouth open to muffle the labor of his breathing.

Stew squeezed his arm. "Luck, kid. Remember, you

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take the mutt all the way out to the windmill before you come back here. And leave the office door open!"

There were two doors to Tom Ingersol's office: an outside door and one giving into the hallway of the ranch-house. The outer door would be barred and General would be on watch by the safe. It was David's mission now to enter the office through the house, unbar the door and quietly lead out the big dog. Then, together, Stew and David would open the office safe. In this way both would be assured that no more than the amount rightfully due them was collected.

The plan was triple-armored, morally and legally. The money belonged to them because it was the estate of John Harney, David's father and Stew's older brother. Nor could Tom Ingersol complain to the law, for he himself had gotten the money by "malefactoring and conspiracy to defraud."

David had been impressed by Stew's knowledge of law. Nevertheless, he wasn't quite convinced that there wasn't a flaw somewhere—if not in Stew's logic, then in his own fortitude. For it was a fact at the moment David wished he was anywhere but where he was. He wished his father never had left him nine hundred dollars. Almost he wished that he never had had an uncle.

He licked his lips. "Stew," he said shakily, "d'you suppose Dough-god had any idea where we were goin' tonight?"

"What makes you say that?" Stew's voice was sharp.

"Quit the stallin', kid! Get goin'!" Stew gave him a push, and David began walking toward the ranch-house.

As David left the barn his nervousness resolved into a sort of somnambulistic detachment. His gaze was riveted to the front. His feet carried him on through the moonless gloom while his mind waited passively for the swoop of catastrophe, the opening of the abyss.

He mounted the steps to the ranch-house porch, raised the latch and pushed the door inward. Subterranean snores issued from the black depths of the house. He paused, listening, not breathing.

Still nothing happened.

David tiptoed along the hall to the front office door. He scratched on the door, and General's snuffings on the opposite side changed to a soft, eager whining. David entered the office and closed the door. General, nudging, thrust his badger-scarred muzzle into his hand.

Suddenly David's heart began to pound. Fumbling desperately in the blackness, he unbarred and opened the outer door. He seized General by the scruff of the neck and fled the office.

Stew had ordered David to leave General by the old windmill pump on the flat beyond the blacksmith shed. When David reached the blacksmith shed he halted, leaning against the building. As his breathing quieted he gazed doubtfully in the direction of the windmill. The windmill was still a distance off—farther, perhaps, than Stew had realized.

General wore no collar. Also he objected to being tied—anytime, anywhere.

David threw down his hat. "Watch it, boy!" he ordered.

General promptly stretched out, his forepaws on the hat brim and his white fangs laughing and gleaming. General would now stay put. So would the hat.

On lagging feet David headed back toward the barn.

STEW was waiting where David had left him, smoking a cigarette. His voice was as untroubled as if opening safes were an everyday occurrence: "Take care of the mutt, did you? Office all clear?

David nodded. "Stew," he said hoarsely, "I've been—"

"Don't say it, kid. Let me say it for you." Stew laid his hand on David's shoulder. "Davie, let's call it off."

David wasn't sure he had heard a-right. His legs began to tremble. "You mean," he said hopefully, yet unbelievingly, "you want to—to *not* take the money after all?"

"That's it." Stew snuffed out his cigarette. "I guess, Davie, I'm just too damn' honest for my own good. Whatever it is, I can't go through with it. Suppose you take the mutt back to the office and shut him up again and we'll forget all about the mo—"

A yell had split the night quiet—a cry of terror, and mingling with it was a roar like that of a small but lively lion.

"The mutt!" cried Stew. Even in the darkness David could see the ringing white of his eyes. He caught David by the shirt and shook him. "Where'd you leave him? At the windmill?"

"The blacksmith shed! I thought—"

"Balls o' fire!" Stew flung David back against the corral and began running. As he ran he pulled out his pearl-handled gun.

David bounced off the corral poles and took after Stew.

The sound of murder by the blacksmith shed continued. From the direction of the house old Hank Tooky's rasping, excited voice, and then Tom Ingersol's, joined the uproar.

Stew and David raced around the corner of the blacksmith shed almost abreast. The gray shape of General, jaws distended, arose from a struggling figure before them. Stew raised his gun.

"Stew! Don't shoot!" David lunged at his uncle. He got his arms about him, and they tumbled to the ground, David on top.

General, seventy-five pounds of awesome fury, drove in hard.

David tried to grapple with him, and the big dog veered, dancing like a boxer. He drove in again and this time he sank his teeth in Stew's leg. He was working on the leg, and Stew and David both were yelling when Tom Ingersol and Hank Tooky came up.

Hank dragged the raging dog backward by his tail.

"Lock him in the shed, Hank, and bring a lantern." Tom's voice was ominously quiet. He was bare-foot, clad in long white drawers and carrying a rifle. He moved close, rifle pointing.

"That you, David?"

"Yes, sir," whispered David. He sat up and bowed his head.

"And you, Stew Harney!"

Stew, too, sat up, nursing his leg in tight-lipped silence.

"And who's this here? Here with the lantern, Hank!"

Old Hank Tooky wore nothing but a shirt. Bare-legged, knob-kneed he stumped forward in a puddle of lantern glow.

The third man on the ground was Dough-god Rottles.

Hank held the lantern high, admiring the big dog's tooth work. "That Gen'al!" he said. He picked up a small canvas sack from beside Dough-god. "See this, Tom? They busted your safe."

Dough-god propped himself on an elbow. Fascinated, he spread a dripping hand to the light, draining it, fingers down. "He said," he muttered, "that the dog would be outa the way. He—"

"Who said?"

"Stew Harney. He got the combination to the safe from the kid."

"David, did you help steal this money?"

"Davie," Stew answered calmly, "was only the fall guy. We used him to get the mutt outa the way. He thought him and I were just goin' to take the nine hundred dollars John left him."

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"There's more than nine hundred in this sack."

"Sure. Dough-god and I knew there'd be. Davie didn't know Dough-god was in the deal. Soon as Davie got the mutt outa the office, Dough-god skipped in and cleaned the safe."

"You said he'd leave the dog by the windmill," Dough-god said accusingly. "You said even if we were caught there wouldn't be any trouble. I ain't goin' to—"

Tom said: "David, is this the truth?"

"I—I guess so. Yes, sir." David kept his eyes covered; his shoulders started to shake.

"Davie," murmured Stew, "is only a dumb kid. I'm the one that talked him into this. I'm willing to take full blame."

Tom said: "You are thoughtful of David all of a sudden. What's back of this?"

"Nothin'. Except, maybe, that I can't forget I'm the kid's uncle." Stew's voice was earnest but undisturbed. "You've got your money back, Tom. If this don't get into the courts and no one hears about it, no one can call Davie a crook. You wouldn't want that to happen. Neither of us would."

"I see," said Tom. "I see your point." And afterwards he said: "If anyone *does* hear about what happened tonight, you and Rottles are going to get prison terms as long as your arm. I swear that! Now pick up your fancy gun and both of you get off my land."

Stew Harney and Dough-god Rottles departed.

"Come on to the office, David," said Tom.

IN THE office David waited numbly while Tom took a small memorandum book from his desk. "David," he said, "the money your father left was put into cattle. According to this I now owe you nineteen hundred and seventy-three dollars."

David shook his head. "I—I don't want it now, Tom. I—"

"I was giving you an accounting, not the money. I've told you before—you'll get that when you're twenty-one." Tom put up the memorandum book. His face, in the yellow lantern light, was as stern as Judgment Day. So was old Hank Tooky's. Both were looking at David.

David stared at the floor. "Tom," he said huskily, "I ain't a crook. I—"

"No," said Tom, "I don't think you are. But I'm not the one to convince. You yourself have to be sure."

"I am sure!" cried David. "I'm so sure that I—Tom, if you'll take me back I'll work for nothin'. I want to show you and Hank that I ain't ungrateful. Besides, I *want* to stay here! This is my home and you've been just like a father to me."

"I wasn't aware, David," said Tom, "that you had left."

"I told you this mornin' that I was goin' to Texas."

"Yes, of course you did. What's the matter with your finger, David? Did the dog nip you?"

"No, sir. I stuck it under the hammer. Stew was goin' to shoot General, and I got my finger caught."

Tom glanced at Hank Tooky and back to David.

After that there was a silence, and David knew that Tom and old Hank were passing judgment.

David kept his head bent, inspecting his finger, pressing his hands, palm down, on the table. They weren't pretty hands. They were merely strong, big-knuckled working hands. Honest hands, he hoped.

Good hands.

All his life now David would remember that. And always would he remember Harry Pelven with his lean, beautiful gunman's hands and his sad face and his strange, haunting eyes. He'd never forget him.

Suddenly in the weighted silence David spoke again. "Tom," he said, "I ain't a crook—I'm sure of that. But I've been something that's maybe just as bad." He lifted his head until he could meet Tom's cold, steely gaze. "A damn' fool, Tom."

Tom turned and opened the bottom drawer of his desk and got out a whiskey bottle and three tin cups. He replied quietly over his shoulder: "Every man is, David, in one way or another."

Tom poured whiskey into the cups and set them on the table, one in front of Hank, one in front of David and one for himself. He looked at David, and his eyes no longer were cold. He raised his cup. "Luck, David," he said, "to *two* damned fools."

"Powder River!" barked old Hank. And then he jarred David with his elbow. "Drink 'er, kid!"

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did — Actually and Literally)

and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do — well — there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and now—?—well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well — this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be — all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well—just write a letter or a post-card to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 909, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now—while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable—but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was. — Advt. Copyright, 1939, Frank B. Robinson.

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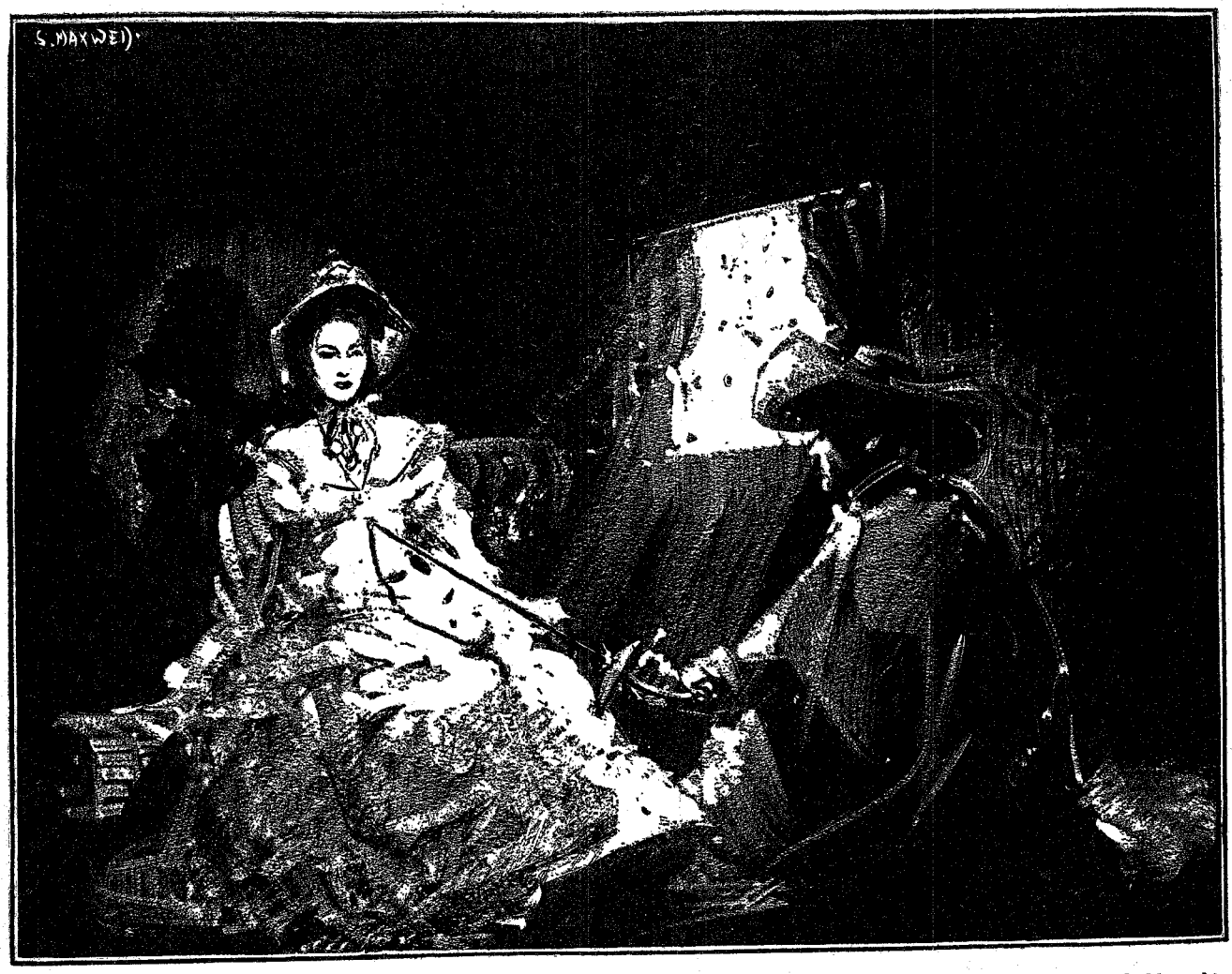
Swords in Exile



Cleve swung around in the coach, holding his blade against the girl's breast

By Murray R. Montgomery

Cardinal Richelieu learns from Sir Harry Winthrop that the King of England has at last pardoned Lord Richard Cleve, who was banished from his homeland some years before. But the Cardinal is loath to part with his valued Guardsman, and so he lies to Sir Harry, telling him that Cleve has left his service and disappeared.

Discovery of Richelieu's duplicity arouses Cleve to a fury. After brazenly insulting the great Cardinal, he charges off in pursuit of Sir Harry and the treasured pardon. But Richelieu is by no means defeated; he orders Count Guy d'Entreville, Cleve's rake-helly companion, to follow and arrest the Englishman. D'Entreville agrees, for if he does not obey, Cleve will summarily be shot.

Sir Harry Winthrop, Richard Cleve and Guy d'Entreville are all heading in the direction of the Duchy of Montferrat. Richelieu had planned to send his two Guardsmen into that principality, for there is trouble brewing in it that may threaten the security of France. This peril the Cardinal had partly explained to d'Entreville before Cleve made his furious escape.

Lying close to Savoy, Montferrat is a vital buffer state, a protectorate of France; if Spain and Austria gain control of it they can easily invade southeastern France. Richelieu has had reports of treason in Montferrat; but but he does not know that Baron Von Erla, an Austrian agent, has already made a pact with Duke Charles of Savoy. The duke has always coveted Montferrat, and Von Erla has promised to give him control of that state if he will sign a treaty with Austria. Duke Charles agrees, although he doesn't understand how Von Erla will fulfill his promise.

Von Erla's plan is simple enough. His two weapons are Catherine Cordoba, a lovely and quite ruthless woman; and Mazo Gardier, a hired swordsman. Catherine Cordoba has already managed to fascinate Count Henri, son of Duke Vincent, of Montferrat; and Von Erla tells her that he will shortly eliminate the duke. Thus she can marry Henri and become the duchess. All she must do is to make it possible for the assassin Mazo Gardier to reach the old duke with his blade. But Catherine does not know that Von Erla plans also to murder Count Henri, so that Montferrat will be completely in the Austrian agent's hands.

But meanwhile Mazo Gardier himself has been eliminated. Pursuing Sir Harry Winthrop and the king's pardon, Richard Cleve gets into combat with Gardier at a roadside tavern, and the hired bravo is killed. Another curious incident has befallen Cleve on his journey. He was held up by a girl dressed in boy's clothing, and she stole his horse from him, telling him no more than her name—Mary de Sarasnac. Cleve knows that name, for d'Entreville fell violently in love with the girl in Paris.

And it was she whom Gardier was seeking!

This story began in the Argosy for July 26

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ARRIVING in the capital of Montferrat, Cleve discovers that Sir Harry Winthrop is staying at the duke's palace, having been injured in a suspicious accident to his carriage. Shortly afterward d'Entreville arrives, so exhausted from his ride that he decides to postpone arresting Cleve until he has had some rest.

At the Duke of Montferrat's palace Richard Cleve is astounded to have the guard captain call him Mazo Gardier. Then Cleve realizes why: He has appropriated Gardier's peculiarly distinctive sword, the hilt of which is set with rubies. Just as the palace guard is about to arrest Cleve, in spite of his protests, a company of archers appears out of nowhere and rescues him. The leader, who also believes that Cleve is Gardier, gives him a note and tells him to make his escape at once. This the highly puzzled Cleve proceeds to do. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

KITTEN, BE COOL

GUY was waiting for Cleve when he returned; waiting with an injured scowl on his lean features and a bottle half-raised to his lips. He was seated behind a dinner-laden table in their room at the Golden Crowns, facing the door. He was completely dressed except for boots and his doublet. He put the bottle down.

"I presume this is the way you honor your arrest!" he grated. "*Sangodemi!* I might have known I could not trust you!"

Cleve closed the door. He felt hot. He was still panting slightly from a hurried circuit of Casale's back streets. Shortly after he had left Antone, an alarm had blared from the palace to send vigilant riders careening through the town. He had had several tight moments.

Antone the Archer, it seemed, was definitely a wanted man. A highwayman; a cunning rogue; a killer who used the bow because of its silence. Cleve learned that even to be suspected of knowing him had caused more than one person to submit to the efficiency of the local headsman.

The Englishman strode to the table and balanced himself on its edge. Guy's characteristic greeting had melted the tenseness in him. He reached leisurely across the lunch, selected a tid-bit from the other's plate and grinned.

"Cheese again, Kitten?" He popped the tiny triangle into his mouth. "Have a pleasant nap?"

Guy kicked back his chair and stood up. He was angry, but it was merely surface rage. During Cleve's absence, he had been thinking. He knew now, despite his word to Richelieu, that it wasn't within his will to be able to arrest his friend. But he'd be cursed if he'd admit it! *Sandiou!* He'd run a bluff first!

"Now mark me, Cleve. You are under arrest. *Corbac!* I do not like this, but it is a fact!"

The English rake-helly smiled amiably, scaled his hat to the bed and slid from the table-top into a chair. He poured himself a goblet of wine before speaking. And then all he said was: "All right, Kitten. But without dramatics."

"*Pardieu!* Cease using that title! I'm serious. My orders are to bring you back to Paris to stand trial for high treason."

"Treason?" Cleve looked innocent. "What did I do?"

"You know well enough. You drew a blade in Richelieu's presence, defied his commands and fled with my aid."

"Ah. With your aid, eh? So you're in this too?"

"*Oui.*"

"And to get out of it, you must turn me over."

"*Sacre nom!*" Guy's fist crashed heavily on the table. The impact sent dishes bouncing and Cleve rescued a bottle from spilling by snatching it with a sweep of his hand. He wagged a finger at Guy, but d'Entreville continued, face flaming:

"*Ventre saint gris!* I might have expected that! *Sangodemi!* Of all the ungrateful, short-witted louts—I ride for days without sleep; go without food and comfort merely to save you from being slaughtered. The Cardinal was about to send carrier pigeons ahead with orders to show you no mercy, to cut you down without warning, to treat you like a mad—a mad—"

"Dog," Cleve supplied and sampled the bottle.

"*Oui!* And then you accuse me of the most heinous motive ever a man could own! *Corbac!* I should call you out!"

"Damme. This is rotten wine!" said Cleve.

He lifted the bottle up to the light—and suddenly it flew apart in his hands, spraying him with wine and bits of shattered glass. A musket's report snapped into the room. It came from the opened window. And d'Entreville, standing to one side, suddenly dove for the floor.

"*Sangodemi!* Down Cleve! That was a musket-ball!"

THE Englishman placed the base of the shattered bottle carefully on the table. His fingers did not tremble. After all, the mysterious marksman *had* missed. Then he arose, went to the window, closed it and drew the shades. He stood there on one side of it, smiling grimly and drying his hand with a kerchief.

"Lovely country, Montferrat," he said.

Guy stood up. He walked over to the wall where the ball was embedded and touched it lightly with his forefinger. The metal was still warm. He turned, frowning.

"*Corbac!* I don't understand it. We're strangers in this town. Why should someone wish our deaths?"

"I fear that ball was meant for me, Kitten," Cleve told him calmly. He returned to the table and drew his blade. "During the course of this night, I have escaped being run down by a hair's breadth. And then when I appeared at the palace gate, I was nearly arrested by a young popinjay who claimed that I was the notorious bravo Mazo Gardier." He stared at the sword in his hand. "This used to belong to Gardier. Perchance it's the reason for everything."

"How did you procure it, *mon ami?*"

Cleve shrugged. "Gardier exchanged it for a spade in Hades. But that isn't important. The fellow apparently had a mission in this duchy—the pleasant business of murdering Duke Vincent."

"*Mordi!*"

"Yes. And Gardier's confederates are very much in evidence also. "The Englishman chuckled. "In fact, three of them rescued me from the clutches of the Duke's guards."

"But that does not explain the musket-shot, *mon ami.* Surely, the duke's guards would not ambush you. An arrest and a public execution is more politic."

Cleve returned the sword to its scabbard. "I know it." He nodded. "That is what makes this affair so damned interesting. Perchance I have a bitter competitor who is vieing with me for the honor of murder." He smiled without mirth. "One thing certain, Gardier's mission had a fearful amount of publicity. Somebody knew his intent and spread the word with—" Suddenly he frowned. He was thinking of Mary de Sarasnac and of Gardier's pursuit of her. Was she in Montferrat?

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BUT d'Entreville didn't notice Cleve's silence. The Frenchman was frowning in deep thought. He knew why Cleve had gone to the Palace. Sir Harry's postillion, a little man named Jacob, had knocked on the door shortly after Guy had started to dress. Upon hearing that Winthrop had been delayed in Casale, the French gallant had easily deduced Cleve's intent. He had taken it for granted that Cleve would succeed.

But now Cleve had returned. He had returned without seeing Sir Harry, embroiled in intrigue, and Guy was deciding to make the most of it. He had definitely committed himself to attempt a solution of Montferrat's mysteries, but he knew he needed Cleve's nimble, logical mind. To assure himself of Cleve's aid he was prepared to go to any lengths. *Pecaire!* It was a duty.

France stood to lose much in Montferrat. Furthermore, he could solve the duchy's difficulties, Richelieu's anger would be forgotten. Guy knew that the Cardinal would never forgive him for abetting Cleve's escape or for failing to make the arrest, unless this problem of Montferrat was solved triumphantly. He felt immensely satisfied with himself for regarding the situation with such practical eyes.

"Sandiou. You have stumbled into one of the very intrigues that *Monseigneur le Cardinal* had planned for our attention, Cleve. For the past two months the gold train, bearing wages to the garrison here, has been waylaid. Not the least of it, there have been several attempts on the life of Colonel de Boussey, the *commandant. Pecaire!* This duchy is rank with plotting."

Cleve sat down. "This duchy is rank without it, Kitten. I'm not interested. As soon as I receive that pardon, it is Richard Cleve for England."

"But not through France," retorted Guy. "A price is on your head there. To reach home you must sail from Venice and around Gibraltar. Triple the time."

"Faith. I need sea-air."

Guy was nonplussed. He was being eminently logical and it wasn't working. He attempted another tack.

"Mark me, I'm interested in the welfare of France but if I return to Paris without you, I return to La Bastille. There is a personal issue in this, *mon ami.*"

Cleve chuckled. "Egad! Then I fear I shall have to take you with me. You'll like England, Kitten."

"Pecaire! You stubborn fool! In the past we have bought the Cardinal's patience with a triumph for him. Settle this Montferrat difficulty and all charges will be dropped. You already have a point of leverage in being mistaken for one of the conspirators."

Cleve shook his head. "It's debatable. I cannot continue to resemble Mazo Gardier for long just because of my sword." He nodded brightly in Guy's direction. "But why don't you solve this riddle yourself? Richelieu will love you again and you can go home."

The French rake-helly's volatile temper began to assert itself. *"Corbac!* I suppose you deem me incapable of slitting open this mystery without your aid."

"Well—" Cleve temporized and grinned.

Guy's lips went tight. *"Sangodemi!"* he erupted. "I was attempting to ease your situation, braggart—not my own. You have been thirsting to arrive in England with all possible dispatch. *Bien.* I was going to aid you to cross France unmolested. But now you can go to—"

Cleve crossed one booted leg over the other and relaxed against the back of his chair. "Ah now, temper, Kitten," he cautioned. "Be uncivil and in England I'll not give you an allowance, a pension or anything."

"You'll give me nothing!" Guy stormed.

"Such bitterness. But I'll lay it to your youth and inexperience. Should you need my sterling advice, old comrade, do not hesitate to ask for it. But soon, of course, because I'll be en route to Venice in a day or so."

Guy started pacing in sharp exasperated circles. *"Ventre saint gris!* The conceit of the lout! The unmitigated conceit!" He spun savagely. "Mark me! I shall solve this affair in half the time it would have taken had I allowed you to encumber me. Four days are all I need. Merely four—"

THERE came a knock at the door—A brisk, authoritative rap. The two cavaliers promptly forgot their quarrel and stared. Neither moved, so the knock repeated itself. Cleve deftly covered the hilt of his rapier with the cuff of his gauntlet.

"'Tis your investigation, Kitten. Perchance that is one of Mazo Gardier's playmates. Answer it."

But the man knocking proved to be a resplendent figure of military carriage; he was standing stiffly before the door, flanked by two soldiers in red-edged surcoats.

"Good evening, *messieurs,*" he said stepping easily into the chamber. "I am Colonel le Vicomte de Boussey, Commandant of His Majesty's Arms in Montferrat. I had expected you to report to me upon arrival, but since the nature of your business is delicate, I report to you."

The speaker was a veritable bear of a man. A smiling blond giant. Yet he moved with the fluid grace of a cat and his gray eyes were very keen and shrewd. His great frame was well padded, but there was no suggestion of softness about him. He was meticulously dressed. Cleve thought his choice of a white doublet a trifle flamboyant but only because it seemed to exaggerate the bigness of the man. One thing certain, de Boussey was no milk-mannered courtier. He bowed swiftly, then seized Guy's hand in a firm grip.

"Undoubtedly you are M. d'Entreville, *monsieur,*" he boomed. "I am glad to welcome you. When informed that you were being sent here, a weight was lifted from my mind. I'm a soldier and inept at the subtler problems of state."

Then he turned to Cleve, ham-like palm extended. "Lord Cleve, I presume. The other of *Monseigneur le Cardinal's* twin devils." He laughed. *"Corbac!* You do not appear as shrewdly mad as your reputation would have you, *monsieur.*"

"Fortunately," Cleve replied and furtively flexed his fingers, which had been nearly paralyzed by de Boussey's viselike grip. He kept his gauntlet firmly over the hilt of his sword. No sense in inviting trouble. He frowned slightly.

Somehow de Boussey's bluff good spirits didn't sit right. They seemed vaguely counterfeit. He didn't know why he should have this suspicion, but it was there and he fell to mulling it over. In the first place, how did the colonel know that he and d'Entreville were in Casale? It was an interesting point. He and Guy had arrived separately, at different hours and without advance notice.

Meanwhile de Boussey had turned to one of his men. "René," he commanded. "Have wine sent up. The best, *comprenez.* Then see to it that we are not disturbed. These gentlemen and I wish to confer."

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CHAPTER XIV

MADEMOISELLE HORSE-THIEF

THE three of them sat around the table for nearly an hour. De Boussey and Guy did most of the talking, while Cleve lolled indifferently in his chair, drank wine and listened. He didn't ask a single question. He learned a lot.

The lootings of the wage-wagons were becoming serious. Officially, de Boussey admitted desertions. A few—not many. But the truth of the matter was that the French garrison was reduced to one third its original strength by such losses, and the thing was like a spreading disease.

Finally Cleve paced to the window. He pulled the shades aside, opened it. He stood there with the hum of their conversation in his ears, wondering if he'd ever be free of his fascination for the unknown. He knew that it constantly betrayed him, yet already his insatiable curiosity was coming awake.

This Montferrat problem was alluring. He tried to ignore the half-formed conclusions in his brain concerning it. But they were there, beckoning him, tickling his imagination.

Determinedly he dug thumbs into his sash. No! With his homecoming at stake he did not dare risk becoming enmeshed in intrigue. Conspiracies were like threads. By drawing out one, you became snarled with many. Then, standing there, he realized that his thumb had touched a crumpled piece of paper—the note Antone had passed to him. He had placed it in his sash while running through the streets. Slowly he slid it free, stared at it an instant, cursed softly and opened it. It was quite cryptic.

House twelve, the market-square, at twelve. Knock two long, three short.

There was no signature. He tore it carefully into bits and sprinkled them out of the window. Then he turned and regained his place at the table. He poured himself another goblet of wine.

"The next shipment of gold is due next week," the colonel was saying. "*Mordi!* It must arrive. Candidly, *Monsieur le comte,* I have a theory. It has been established that our local bandit, a clever knave known as Antone the Archer, has been recruiting men. Before these robberies his Band was composed of but a handful. Now it exceeds two-score rogues."

"I see," Guy nodded. His dark eyes were grave, thoughtful. He frowned slightly. "But surely an ignorant highwayman could not know when to strike with such consistency, *Monsieur le vicomte.* Each gold-train has been cloaked in secrecy as to the time of arrival and the number of guards carried. To my mind, Antone may be a tool. True, he may be the raider, but since the lootings are conducted with such accuracy, it would appear that a traitor lurks somewhere in a high place."

DE BOUSSEY'S rich laughter rolled through the room. He slapped the table as though highly pleased. "Precisely, *monsieur!* I must compliment your astuteness. Of course, Antone could not do it alone. But who is the rogue's compatriot?"

"That," Guy said slowly, "remains to be seen. Perchance after I confer with His Highness, Duke Vincent, I shall have more information to progress on."

De Boussey nodded. "Undoubtedly. It was for that purpose, among other things, that I came tonight. The duke desires that you and M. Cleve establish yourselves at the palace the better to observe conditions. Had he known of your arrival sooner, he would have insisted that you do so immediately. But as it is now, he regrets being unable to interview you tonight. Poor health, you know. He retires early.

"But even so, *Monsieur le comte,* there is one—er—suspect whom naturally he will not mention in his interview. His son, Henri de Casale. I myself do not enjoy mentioning this, but I feel it my duty. Observe Henri closely, *monsieur,* and remember that he will succeed his father."

Cleve frowned slightly and thoughtfully drained the last of his wine. Outside in the town, the great clock in the market-square tolled the quarter-hour solemnly. Cleve stood up, smiling wryly at them and at himself for what he had decided to do.

"I feel the need of of clean night air, gentlemen. I feel assured that you will continue discussing your problem as though I were here."

D'Entreville wanted him to stay, but was too stubborn to admit it. Cleve nodded pleasantly and left.

He walked slowly through the dark streets, gloved fingers curled to his hilt, thoughtful but wary. Casale was not unlike other towns of the times. Its streets were patrolled indifferently by a careless watch and the lone pedestrian at night took his life in his hands by merely passing through them.

But eventually he arrived in the now deserted market-square, feeling relieved at the peace of the city and excited by the prospect of what he was tempting Fate to do.

"Cleve, you're a fool. A nosey, snooping, fool!"

HE found number twelve on the opposite side of the square from where he had entered and after wasting precious minutes in its discovery, he stood at length in the stygian shadow of its overhung second story. It was a fairly big building, pretentious. The lanterns of the watch bobbed across the mall and he waited until they had passed before turning to knock twice upon the door, and then thrice in quick succession. The door swung inward. The market clock took up a monotonous toll of twelve.

"Monsieur Gardier?"

Cleve's grip relaxed on the hilt of his blade. It was a girl's voice, soft, very young. He had been fearful that a man would answer—a man who knew Gardier.

"Of course," he replied.

"Inside, *monsieur.* We must introduce ourselves."

Cleve grinned. Faith, his luck was holding beautifully. She did not know the real Gardier. He accepted the soft fingers that groped for his arm and followed them as they pulled him inside.

The little foyer in which he stood was dark, but not so dark as the night outside. A heavy velvet drape shut out the light from another room, but the small bright cracks from the borders gave a faint illumination. The faint perfume of her reached his nostrils.

"You are most punctual, *monsieur,*" she said.

"In my profession, *mademoiselle,* punctuality is wisdom."

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The draperies were brushed aside, and they were in the adjacent room. He discovered that she was adorable; entirely unlike the hardened adventuress he had expected. The innocent loveliness of her face . . . the exquisite symmetry of a perfect form. It was hard to belive that she could have need for a hired killer.

"Have you completed ogling me, *monsieur?*"

He grinned. "Merely returning your compliment, *mademoiselle.*"

She laughed and indicated an ornate Venetian chair next to the wall. "*La, monsieur,* apparently your wit is as nimble as your blade."

Cleve sat down, drawing his sword across his lap so that the rubies in the hilt glinted alive beneath the candlelight. She regarded the jewels with frank covetousness.

"Perhaps after this affair you might offer me one as a remembrance, *monsieur.*"

"Perhaps." He cocked an eyebrow. "If you make it worth the remembrance."

She flushed at that, a light of anger came into her eyes. "We had best come to the gist of our business, *monsieur,*" she decided. "Since one of my servants observed your arrival this morning, I have arranged a complete—er—playlet for you to act."

"Your servant? Is Antone a servant of yours, *mademoiselle?*"

She inclined her head. "At times I find uses for him. I saved him from the block a year ago."

"Ah. Then he does not work for the same government as do we."

She did not react to this subtle probe for information. "Antone is my agent," she replied.

"As am I now, *mademoiselle.*" He said it with great gravity, but there was a devil dancing in his eye.

SHE regarded him stiffly. "For a man of ice, Gardier, you display a remarkable warmth. But we have little time for chit-chat. I will explain what you are to do, and then you must leave. If Henri—"

"Ah. Henri is it? The jealous husband."

Henri," she explained with some heat, "is secretly my affianced. He is the duke's son. I am expecting him soon for a late supper and should he discover your presence here, the baron's whole scheme will be dangerously unbalanced."

CLEVE settled back to consider this bit of information. His purpose had been to learn the background, the surrounding figures, of this conspiracy, but her belief in his complete knowledge of the affair had thwarted him so far.

Now, however, discovery of her relationship to the duke's son gave him a clue. Egad! The woman intended to become the Duchesse de Montferrat. It was irrefutable in the face of her statements. She had not claimed Henri as her lover—but as her affianced.

And Henri obviously knew nothing of the plot, else how could his discovery of Gardier's presence unbalance the picture? The intrigue did not belong entirely to her either. It was not a two party plot. She hadn't hired Gardier—she did not know Gardier. It was the baron's plot. But who in the devil was the baron? Cleve frowned; and then her words jerked him out of his conjectures.

"Tomorrow, *monsieur,* you will arrive at this house as my brother from Mantua. Today I was supposed to receive a letter announcing your arrival. You will be expected. You will take quarters under this roof."

"I see." He nodded. "As your brother I shall have egress into most court circles." He smiled as he considered Gardier would have smiled under the circumstances. "Eventually, I shall accompany His Highness, Duke Vincent on a hunting foray and there shall be an accident, a fatal accident to the fine old gentleman."

She bit her lip. "I care little as to your method, *monsieur.* I merely furnish the opportunities." She went to the mantel and took a sheaf of papers from it. Returning, she handed them to him. "Study these references. I have built a complete family history in them so that we may converse before anyone concerning our bogus parents. Remember that your name is Emile. Emile Cordoba."

He stood up. "And yours?"

She frowned "Catherine Cordoba, of course."

He nodded, smiling. "Of course."

Then she took him lightly by the arm. "And now, Monsieur Gardier, until tomorrow goodbye."

CHAPTER XV

ROGUES' PALACE

THE next morning was mist-laden with a noiseless drizzle sifting through, and as the coach Colonel de Boussey had furnished rumbled sullenly toward the palace, Cleve carefully drew the weather-drapes and heightened the collar of his cape. He slanted his broad-brimmed hat low over his eyes. Beside him, d'Entreville observed the action frowningly.

"*Pecaire!* It isn't that damp," he complained.

Cleve chuckled. "No. But 'twill be a cursed amount damper in the palace dungeon, should that popinjay at the gate recognize me."

But at the gate the popinjay did not recognize him. The popinjay was too concerned over the effect of rain upon his vestments to hinder the great coach for more than a cursory inspection. Cleve grinned. Despite its discomfort, bad weather had virtues.

The coach rolled across the inner bailey of the palace yard and up to the stone dias of the grand entrance. It creaked to a halt.

De Boussey and a spidery little fop, bedecked in rose and saffron with diamond buckles on his velvet slippers, awaited in the shelter of the gothic arch. They started to descend, but a sudden squall drove them back. Liveried lackeys swirled around them, to open the coach door and to porter such meager baggage as the two rake-hellies possessed.

"*Messieurs,*" the huge colonel said, as they mounted the stone steps, "I desire you to meet le Sieur de Maupin, steward to His Highness the Duke. Monsieur de Maupin is commanded by His Highness to assure your comfort, and to escort you to the audience chamber."

"Our honor, *monsieur,*" Guy said politely.

De Maupin simpered. In the heavy silk of his clocked hose, his legs were decorative but spindly. He flicked a vermillion kerchief from his satin sash, brushed it lightly across his thin nose and bowed with a flourish. A whiff of perfume floated from him.

Cleve and d'Entreville eyed each other briefly, shook their heads. They detested the breed. Then they flicked

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gauntlets across their noses, simpered becomingly and bowed in return. De Boussey caught the play and nearly gagged attempting to choke down a great guffaw.

"I—ah—I shall leave you in le Sieur de Maupin's care, *messieurs,*" he told them quickly. "I must fulfill an appointment."

He turned away.

"Now if I could think of a similar excuse," Cleve remarked blandly and shrugged.

But the exchange was lost on the fop. As de Boussey stumped off across the courtyard, de Maupin gestured airily toward the doorway and minced lightly through it, the wood of his high red heels snapping crisply on the tile. "If *messieurs* will do me the honor of accompaniment—"

"But certainly, *monsieur,*" agreed d'Entreville. "We are content to follow you—at a safe distance, of course. Come along, Cleve. I desire to know if it's alive."

"Faith! That makes two of us," Cleve answered.

But this time, the effeminate dandy caught the gist. He sniffed. "Well, really, gentlemen!" And started away.

Cleve nudged his friend ahead. "You first, Kitten. And don't lose sight of it. It knows where we're going."

THEIR mincing guide ushered them down a high-walled corridor, past a line of stiff-visaged pikemen and into the palace's grand foyer. It was a large room, oval in shape and rimmed midway to its ceiling by a gallery with a marble balustrade. A deep blue carpet covered the floor. Directly opposite the archway through which they had entered was a great sweeping staircase. This interior commanded admiration.

De Maupin swished his way diagonally across the room; paused to throw wide a pair of convergent doors, and turned.

"The audience chamber, *messieurs,*" he announced primly. "Be so good as to wait inside and His Highness shall be with you directly."

Cleve patted d'Entreville encouragingly on the shoulder. "We part for the nonce, Kitten. Go there and wait. 'Twill offer you time and seclusion to sharpen the questions you intend asking the duke."

Guy frowned. "What of you?"

"I have other business." Cleve inclined his grin in de Maupin's direction. "Will you be so good as to escort me to Sir Harry Winthrop, *cherie?*"

The palace steward sighed. "Oh very well, *monsieur.* But I must confess it's vexatious. You might have mentioned it sooner." He pranced off, tugging peevishly at the gold medallion chain looped around his thin neck. "This way, *monsieur.*" The chain broke, unnoticed by him, and slid to the carpet.

Guy picked it up. "It has lost its leash," he said and then scowled. "Had I suspected your motive for coming to the palace, I'd have spiked it, Cleve. I thought you had decided to aid me."

The other chuckled. "Come now, why else should I be here? Besides, you're too big for spitefulness, Kitten. And consider—" He held up four fingers. "I'm giving you the four days you say are needed."

He took the chain and strode off after de Maupin, grinning. D'Entreville glared in his wake. "Clown!" The Frenchman then whirled, stumped into the richness of the audience chamber, and slammed himself into a chair. There were times when he regretted knowing Cleve.

MEANWHILE the English cavalier was offering de Maupin the medallion. They were mounting the staircase. The little fop warmed toward him considerably, and by the time they reached the top he was gushing volubly.

"Undoubtedly you consider me a short-spoken brute, *monsieur,*" he said. "But I have been greatly put upon these past days. Affairs of the palace, you know. I fear it has soured my otherwise sweet humor. 'Tis guests, *monsieur. Ma foi!* Never have I encountered so many guests!"

They were pacing along the circular gallery now. De Maupin continued: "First the daughter of Charles Emmanuel, Margaret of Savoy, chooses to—er—visit His Highness, ostensibly for her health. And then—"

Cleve frowned. "Margaret of Savoy is in the palace?"

"*Certainment.* And confidentially, *monsieur*—up to no good. She has a personal guard, a brute named Enrico. Totally uncouth, *monsieur.* Ever sneaking about and listening."

Cleve made a mental note to advise Guy about Margaret and her companion. "Did she bring many retainers?"

"Not many, *monsieur.* Four ladies, a coach-crew and that Enrico person. But Margaret of Savoy is merely the beginning. Also staying with us is Signor Orlando, the close comrade of the duke's son. A most dangerous churl if you ask me, *monsieur.* Ever dueling, drinking and cursing. Some say he was once a notorious highwayman. Then yester-morning, *monsieur,* the duke's ward arrived. Arrived in a scandalous manner, *monsieur.* Unthinkable for a lady of her breeding."

"Drunk?" Cleve hazarded as they turned down a long hallway leading through the palace's north wing.

"But no!" De Maupin looked sincerely shocked. "Heaven forbid! But 'twas nearly as bad, *monsieur.*" He stopped talking and gestured daintily with a rolling wrist to a doorway on the right.

"My destination?" Cleve ventured.

"Precisely. Knock and Sir Harry's man will answer. It never fails. And now pray excuse me for there are innumerable things to be done. Your own suite must be put to rights and the lackeys on my staff are wholly inadequate without my personal supervision. So until later, *monsieur.* Adieu."

"Adieu." Cleve nodded.

De Maupin swept into a low bow, which Cleve decided against attempting to duplicate; and then marched in a sprightly fashion back up the corridor. Cleve stared after him, smiling. But he was completely aware of de Maupin's importance. That little magpie knew more concerning the palace personnel than anyone else, Duke Vincent included.

"At times a man must use the weirdest of allies," he muttered and then bent his attention to Sir Harry's door.

BEFORE he could rap his knuckles against the paneling, the door swung inward and he was facing a goateed gentleman of fifty, dressed somberly in black and carrying a small leather case beneath one arm. The fellow was startled. He half-closed the door before Cleve extended his foot and jammed the partition with the toe of his boot.

"One moment, m'lad. I've come a long distance to visit Sir Harry and it is hardly polite to slam his door

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on my face. Cleve is my name. Lord Richard Cleve at your service, sir."

"Oh."

The gentleman appeared uneasy. He took control of himself with visible effort. "You surprised me, *monsieur*. I am the duke's physician, Doctor Despartes."

"A pleasure to know you, doctor. But of your patient. Capable, I trust, of receiving visitors."

"Er—well, *monsieur*. He is asleep and—"

Sir Harry's baritone echoed from the depths of the chamber. Cleve recognized it immediately—deep, grating and pompous.

"Who is there, by Gad?" Sir Harry wanted to know.

Cleve smiled at Despartes and eased himself gracefully around the physician. "With your permission, doctor. Matter of state, you know."

Despartes nodded. "But of course, *monsieur*. Enter." He seemed to have regained perfect composure. "I have other matters demanding my attention. I bid you good day, *monsieur*." And nodding again politely, he departed.

Cleve stared after him. "Queer coot," he muttered.

He found Sir Harry propped up in a large bed, a triple layer of pillows beneath him, his splint-fitted leg jutting at an angle from beneath the coverlet. Sir Harry was scowling his surprise. His rugged features wore an expression of incredulity which he strove vainly to suppress.

"Cleve, by Gad!"

The English rake-helly nodded. Despite the importance of this meeting to him, he could not control his old impulse to deflate Sir Harry's pomposity.

"A remarkable deduction, Sir Harry," he commented easily. "Er—for you, that is."

"Hmmph! You haven't changed much. Well, what do you want?"

CLEVE reached out and pulled up a chair that appeared as if it might rightly belong in milady's boudoir. He sat down on it gingerly and regarded his surroundings. The room was square, comfortably large, with scatter rugs on the polished floor, an ornate fireplace in the corner and two doors, closed, facing each other from opposite walls.

"My permit to return home," he admitted quietly. "I've pursued you the full way from Paris to get it."

Sir Harry rubbed his chin. "All the way from Paris, eh? Gad's teeth! Perchance you *have* changed. The Cleve I knew wouldn't have bothered." His veined eyes narrowed. "Why are you in such a rash to return home, m'lord?"

"Well." Cleve tilted back in the chair. "Well, I've become fearfully sick of what the French pass as ale. My tongue has been out for the real brew ever since you escorted me to the docks at Portsmouth. Faith! A man can develop a famous thirst in five years, you know."

Sir Harry stiffened. "By Gad! My first analysis was correct. You are still a wastrel, a roistering rake-helly, with nothing in your head but pleasure. Why I should have troubled to procure your pardon is more than I can conceive. Probably love for your late sire. Your father, m'lord, was a true gentleman and my closest friend and I am happy that he did not live to see the wild, pleasure-bent hellion into which his son has developed!"

"Temper, Sir Harry," Cleve reprimanded.

"Bah! I'll give you your pardon to rid myself of the sight of you. It's in my dispatch case along with many more important papers. Reach under my mattress, Cleve and fetch it out."

"Ah," said Cleve running fingers swiftly into the place mentioned, "secrets, eh? Do you always sleep on your missions, Sir Harry?"

The older man snorted his disgust. "I dislike your inference, puppy. It so happens that my mission concerns business vital to the defense of England—important contracts which Spain would be overjoyed to read. I dare not let them out of my sight. Frankly, I believe those secret contracts are the reason for my broken shank. The wrecking of my coach was intended—" Suddenly he paused and looked uneasy. What is the trouble?"

CLEVE had run eager fingers between the mattress and the base-slats without encountering the precious dispatch case. Now he skirted the foot of the bed and repeated the quest. He ended it at the head of the mattress and straightened.

"There is no dispatch case here," he said.

Sir Harry went white. His gnarled fingers were trembling as he rolled awkwardly on his side to verify the announcement. "By Gad! It must be! I—" He suddenly fell back against the pillows, panting from his efforts, staring in horrified anticipation of the future.

"If a Spanish agent has taken them, Spain will know how pitiably weak our naval defenses are. Venice was to furnish sufficient vessels of war—" He broke off. "Look again, Cleve. The dispatch case *must* be there!"

But it was a futile gesture, although Cleve went through the motions. The dispatch case was gone.

"When did you last see it?" he asked.

Sir Harry seemed stunned. "Last night. Last night I took it out to ascertain its safety. Everything was in order, last night. I—" He reached suddenly upward and clutched Cleve in an iron grip. "You must get it back, lad! If Spain learns how inept our forces are, she might attack immediately to take advantage. England needs that dispatch case! If you cannot bring it—"

"Be easy, friend. Faith! 'Tis not the end of the world, you know. We'll fetch it back." And Cleve grinned. "Damme! That rogue stole my pardon!"

And suddenly Sir Harry realized something he had never seen before. He realized how much Richard Cleve resembled his father. This trick of using a few light words to conceal a deep sincerity of purpose was inherited. The elder Cleve had once ridden the hoofs off a horse to buy a new bonnet in London and also warn King James I of a plot on his life. Now his son was planning to prevent possible war, ostensibly because of a stolen pardon. Sir Harry was faced with the possibility that perhaps he had been misjudging Richard Cleve for years.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SCARLET PONIARD

CLEVE decided later that the filching of the case was the work of an amateur. Sir Harry's visitors since last evening could be counted on three fingers. Of course there was Andrews, the valet. But Andrews had been with Sir Harry for forty years. He was beyond suspicion.

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Only three visitors: Duke Vincent, who had dropped in to inquire as to his guest's welfare; Jacob, who had visited his master during breakfast; and Doctor Despartes. It was this latter Cleve intended seeing first. Despartes had acted skittish at the door; he had appeared overly anxious to leave once Cleve had entered.

"Despartes!" the English cavalier muttered, pacing down the corridor leading from Sir Harry's suite. "Damme! I'll wager he's been bought. If I can reach him before he turns that dispatch case over to his purchaser, then—"

He allowed the sentence to trail, and increased his stride. He was rounding the corner which joined the hallway with the gallery when he first noticed the squad. He was halfway around the gallery when the squad first noticed him.

It was a routine squad, sent to patrol the corridors—not because they needed it, but because tradition demanded it—and the men were not alert. But the officer in charge was; the moment he saw Cleve, his bared blade swung up in a flourish.

"Halt, Gardier! Halt in the duke's name!"

It was the popinjay of the gate. The same arrogant, mustached officer who had almost incarcerated Cleve the night before. He was wearing a new hat.

"The devil!" Cleve muttered.

Without breaking stride he reversed direction.

Then began the chase. He led them once around the circular gallery. He started to do it again with the intention of descending the grand staircase upon reaching it, but the fact that guardsmen were pouring into the foyer below, attracted by the popinjay's yowls for assistance, deterred him. He paused uncertainly before the corridor that led into the palace's south wing. Then he whirled and sped down it.

"This would have to happen now," he panted.

Behind, guards were streaming into the hallway. The clatter of their side-arms, halbard staffs and running feet threw muffled echoes far ahead of him. One of the doors lining the corridor flew open and a man peered out owlishly.

"Wash to do?" he inquired drunkenly. "Wassa dif'culty? Quiet!"

Of course, Cleve didn't recognize Henri de Casale. He had never before seen Henri's weakly handsome face; but Cleve did recognize the opportunity to prevent himself from running into a cul-de-sac. The corridor apparently ended a few rods further along in a blank wall.

"Mind if I join you, bucko?"

The English rake-helly shouldered open the door and burst past the gaping Henri with desperate agility. He couldn't afford to spend a day in the dungeons with Despartes loose.

HENRI'S apartment was in wild disorder. The table in the center was covered with bottles, plates, half-eaten food and the remnants of two long-stemmed pipes. A rapier lay discarded in the corner.

Near the rapier a fat man lay snoring, his doublet open, his unshod feet on an overturned chair. Two more men were sitting at another table playing at dice. One of them, a swarthy-faced fellow with shirt open to reveal a chest covered with black hair, stood up. His hand shot to a dagger.

"Por bacco! Who are you? You dare disturb—"

But Cleve paid ltttle heed. On the far side of the room, a latticed window reaching to the floor attracted his eye. He was headed toward it even as the speaker started to protest.

"Best forget your game, lads," he advised. "In a moment you are going to have visitors." Then he was through the window and crossing the narrow little balcony outside. It had stopped raining. Sunlight was straining to filter the clouds.

He paused a moment, one leg over the balustrade, calculating his chances. The balcony stood a good fifteen feet from the glistening cobbles. But pursuit allowed no alternative and he was forced to flip himself over the side, gripping the balustrade low before releasing hold. He landed limply, but even so the impact nearly jarred the senses from him. One leg felt numb.

"Faith! Trust it still works!"

Then someone on the balcony fired a pistol and he stood up and broke into a run.

A coach was leaving the grounds as he approached one of the side gates. It was a small coach, gilt-trimmed, with only a driver and a footman in charge. They sat stiffly in the seat forward, and he was able to pad up to the slow-rolling vehicle without being observed. Running beside the door, he drew his blade, reached for the knob and climbed swiftly inside. There was a startled gasp.

"Your pardon," he said, pointing his blade in the direction of the gasp. "No outcry, please."

"You!" exclaimed the passenger.

"Eh?"

Kneeling tensely on the floor, eyes cast back through the window, Cleve hadn't time to inspect his hostess. That it was a hostess had registered vaguely upon first entry, but now he turned to survey her more closely. She was slim, dark and beautiful. Her name was Mary de Sarasnac!

"WELL, if it isn't my old friend the horse-thief." Cleve grinned. "Greetings, *mademoiselle.* Is this coach actually yours, or have you embarked on larger ventures?"

She strove to edge cautiously around the point of his blade that was still resting against her middle. He shifted it to follow her progress.

"Really, *monsieur!*" she exclaimed. "Must you prod that weapon at me?"

He nodded pleasantly. "Until we pass the gate. If I remember correctly you are a tricky one. There are several gentlemen who desire me to remain in the palace as their guest for a hanging."

"Hanging!" Her dark eyes looked startled, and then they swept to the rubied hilt of his rapier. "Oh," she said, suddenly calm. "So you are he? I never suspected it on the road, or I wouldn't have missed with my first shot."

He questioned the statement with his eyes, but his lips were smiling. "Is murder another of your practices?"

"Against such as you—"

"Faith! And just who do you think I am?"

She shrugged. "We are past the gate, *monsieur,*" she said glancing out of the window. "You will be kind enough to remove your sword." She paused. "And yourself, as well."

"Faith! Not the least hospitable, Mary." He laughed and groped behind him for the door handle. "I crave to

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tarry longer, but there are several pressing affairs to attend to, so I must away." He stepped back through the door, one foot dangling cautiously. "See you anon, my sweet!"

"And I trust from the end of a rope."

Cleve caught a flashing glimpse of a shapely calf, a small satin slipper. He felt the sole of the slipper on his chest; and then he was suddenly sprawling backwards into the street.

THE Englishman sat there a moment, legs wide, cursing. The coach rattled on over the cobbles and he heard its door clack emphatically as she jerked it shut. Ignoring the crowd which was collecting, he climbed painfully to his feet, half-tempted to pursue and place her over his knee to administer vengeance; but then the humor of the situation struck him and he grinned ruefully.

"Score two for you, lass. But mark this, my child, some day we'll have a reckoning."

Brushing the road-dirt carefully from his clothes, he wondered who she really was and why she was in Casale. Another Cordoba, perhaps? A high-born adventuress? Whatever the answer, he was positive of one thing. Mary de Sarasnac meant trouble. Then he shrugged her from his mind and elbowed his way through the curious.

He hadn't the vaguest idea of where to go. To return to the palace and its attendant risks would be both foolish and futile. With the whole garrison on the alert, Cleve's chances of locating Doctor Despartes were very slim indeed. But even without this hazard, he realized that his quarry would not be lingering on the grounds. Despartes would be somewhere delivering his loot.

"Faith! You've mangled the first move of this business beautifully," he told himself. "That dispatch case has arrived at its destination."

A rough bench beside a moss-slimed fountain, which was used as a watering-trough for horses, attracted him. He eased his frame onto it thoughtfully. A peasant, with two foul-smelling steeds in tow, approached and set his charges to guzzling. The horsey odor, combined with a thousand and one flies, soon caused the cavalier to quit the place, still undecided as to his course, but definitely annoyed. A man can't think with the hind-quarters of a farm horse looming before his eyes; nor is a coarse swishing tail in his face much of an inducement, either.

"It resolves to but a single point," he told himself at length. "To recover the case, I must needs start from the beginning. To start from the beginning I must find a thread, a definite clue, and since Despartes is for the nonce unavailable, the only alternative is to delve willy-nilly into the intrigues of Montferrat in hope that I come up with something. Faith! 'Twould not be the first time that one conspirator aimed at two targets. Perchance Catherine Cordoba's Baron X is also interested in English affairs."

Of course the idea wasn't as logical as he strove to make it sound. But with the quest for the dispatch case momentarily stalemated, he could think of nothing better to do, and ten minutes later he was pacing in quick strides across the market square toward house number twelve.

THERE were four horses standing in front of the door, attended by a soldier of the palace guards. The Englishman frowned slightly.

"Your pardon, my good fellow," he addressed the trooper. "This is the residence of Mademoiselle Cordoba, isn't it?"

The man smoothed the front of his red-edged surcoat and nodded. He owned the sort of face that went with a monosyllabic conversation—toothily blank.

"Uh huh. *Oui,*" he said.

"These mounts belong to your officers?"

"Uh huh."

"Mademoiselle Cordoba is not in trouble, is she?"

"Dunno."

"But surely there is a reason for your presence here?"

"Uh huh."

"Damme. What is it?"

"Orders," said the fellow.

Cleve gave it up. Hitching up his rapier, he strode past the man to the door and when the fellow offered no protest, decided that there was nothing serious afoot after all.

He hadn't read the papers Catherine had given him, but he banged cheerfully on the door anyway. The knock of a loving brother. He grinned. He'd pick up his cues about being Emile as she dropped them. Then the door opened and a swarthy cadet-officer eyed him questioningly.

"*Monsieur?*"

"I have come to visit Mademoiselle Cordoba," Cleve told him.

"That will be difficult, *monsieur.*"

"Why? Is she ill?

Before the other could reply a basso boomed from the interior of the house. A familiar basso.

"*Hola,* Brisson. Who is that?"

Cleve made his own answer, recognizing the tones of Colonel de Boussey. He knew that to play Emile Cordoba now was out of the question. "Have your gentleman permit my pasage, Colonel," he called. "This is Richard Cleve."

"But of course. Pass him, Brisson."

The doorman stepped aside with a nod and Cleve entered. He did it with a multitude of mental reservations, wondering how she would react when the Colonel introduced him. De Boussey met him in the foyer.

"*Corbac!* You surely have a nose for trouble, *monsieur.* Whatever led you to suspect murder in this house?"

"A mur—" Cleve hurriedly clapped a smile over his astonishment. "Sorry to disillusion you, Colonel," he said. "I was totally ignorant that murder has been done." He sobered and posed the question gingerly: "Cordoba?"

De Boussey nodded. He led the way into the sitting room and gestured eloquently. The room was a study in violent disorder. Torn draperies, smashed lamps and shattered crystal-ware. A silent trooper was engaged in cleaning it up.

Cleve stepped forward. An overturned chair attracted his attention. It was the dainty Venetian chair in which he had sat the night before. Now it was broken—stained with blood. He looked quickly at the colonel.

"Not very pretty," he said.

"It isn't, *monsieur.*"

DE BOUSSEY pulled aside the chair and revealed a sheet-draped figure on the floor. Cleve didn't need to be told who it was, but de Boussey lifted the covering to reveal the beauty of Catherine's face, now frozen into

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a death mask of terror. Cleve fought down the clammy revulsion that the sight of death always inspired in him and pushed his wide-brimmed hat to the back of his head.

"Too bad. I wanted to ask her several questions. Wonder what caused it?"

"Passion," returned de Boussey and dropped the sheet. "Brutal, drunken passion!"

Cleve cocked an eyebrow. The colonel's tones had the ring of authority, but knowledge of Catherine's secret activities caused the English gallant to question the statement. He said nothing, but apparently de Boussey sensed his doubt for he added quickly:

"You see, *monsieur*, I am fully aware of the identity of the murderer, and the reasons for his act. As you have mentioned, there were questions you desired to ask Cordoba. When I first arrived this morning, I had a similar mission."

"Then you were here before? Two visits?"

"*Oui.* The first time I discovered the body." De Boussey regarded the Englishman gravely. "This is no ordinary affair, *monsieur*. I discovered Catherine Cordoba with this stiletto in her throat." He gave Cleve a finely worked blade of Italian design, crusted with gems and bearing a family crest on the hilt. Cleve inspected that crest thoughtfully.

"Beside the body of Catherine Cordoba was the owner of that weapon, *monsieur,*" de Boussey continued grimly. "He was insensible from drink. I took him with all dispatch away from here and then returned to tie up what loose ends he might have left."

"You are positive that he committed the deed?"

Mon dieu, monsieur. 'Tis a terrible admission, but in the face of the evidence, what else can I conclude?"

"Nothing, I fear," Cleve replied and handed him back the stiletto.

Shortly thereafter he quit the house. He was frowning. If de Boussey was right, if the news spread, then hell would pour through the streets of Casale. But there was more to it than that. His first lead into the maze of mystery had brought him nowhere. There remained nothing to do but to search for a new one. Antone, for example. But he hadn't taken ten steps down the street when he glimpsed a figure that immediately changed his mind—the person of Doctor Despartes.

CHAPTER XVII

HIS UNHAPPY HIGHNESS

FOR the first fifteen minutes of waiting, Guy d'Entreville sat quietly in his chair, previewing his interview with the duke; asking questions concerning Antone the Archer, Henri, de Boussey, and even a brief inquiry regarding that little fluff de Maupin. But at length, the game grew tiresome, so he gave it up.

Then he considered Cleve. The Englishman's firm refusal to have anything to do with the affair was discouraging. Guy needed Cleve and he was wise enough to admit it. Montferrat was a great kettle of trouble with dark things simmering beneath its surface, and to fish in it, one must be an expert angler. The Englishman was all that, and more. How to force him to cast a line was a poser. D'Entreville planted elbows on the table and scowled. Finally he cursed and gave it up too.

He inspected the blade of his rapier, resheathed it and arose. He passed solemnly the length of the room, critically surveying the portraits lining its wall and then he paused. A door centered in the rear wall was ajar and the faint muffled murmurings of conversation drifted to him.

Had he been in any other mood, he would have virtuously returned to his former position, well out of earshot. But the fact that he was bored, plus the honest belief that he might learn something, caused him quietly to draw up a chair and then to seat himself with a sort of furtive dignity. The conversation in the adjacent chamber was being carried on by two voices: a man's and a woman's. The woman was speaking.

"—since I've been here, Enrico. I have seen Henri but twice in that time. I fear that my mission to Montferrat is futile."

Guy frowned.

"Ah, but wait, my lady," a man's lower tones returned. "Is the grand-daughter of Charles Emmanuel to surrender thus easily? You were sent to entice the heir of Montferrat into marriage. You must not fail. Savoy needs this duchy. If you are Henri's wife when he comes to power—"

"I understand, Enrico. But so long as Catherine Cordoba holds Henri's heart, I can do nothing."

"You have nothing to fear from her any more. From now on, you shall have Henri for yourself, my lady."

"Enrico!" The faint stirrings of horror edged the woman's tones. In the other room, Guy strained sideways to hear as she continued: "Enrico! What do you mean?"

A pause. "Catherine Cordoba is dead, my lady."

"How do you know?"

"I visited her this morning. She is dead."

"*Dios!* You didn't—you have not done this thing! I know it was my grandfather's plan to send me here to interest Henri, but violence was not the course. I wish none of your violence, *señor!*"

The man's tones were flat. "Have I admitted thrusting the fatal blade?"

"No. No, Enrico. But I know of your tricks."

"Nevertheless, I have not admitted to the deed. Be easy. I suggest you dismiss the thought from your conscience and plan to see more of your—er—future husband."

"Perchance you are right."

"Naturally. And now, my lady, accept my arm. Let us promenade the wall terrace. The sun is beginning to break through the morning's clouds and the fresh air will be invigorating."

In the audience chamber Guy heard the pad of their footsteps, followed by the soft click of a door closing, and then silence. He sat frowning.

THIS was the first inkling that he'd had that the grand-daughter of the Duke of Savoy was in Montferrat. He didn't like it. But then, Richelieu had warned him against the cunning duplicity of Charles Emmanuel.

The French cavalier gnawed his upper-lip thoughtfully. He wondered if this fellow Enrico had murdered Henri's paramour. *Pecaire!* Eavesdropping paid! However, he had little time to ponder. At the end of the room, the doors swung open and Duke Vincent entered. The nobleman hesitated a moment, frowning.

"Monsieur le Comte d'Entreville?" he asked.

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Guy stood up and bowed. He found himself liking the older man immediately. There was dignity in Duke Vincent's bearing. He was an erect figure, gray-eyed, crisply bearded and silver-haired—very much the military gentleman of the old school. He nodded a polite return to Guy's bow, took a position at the head of the table, and beckoned Guy closer. He looked tired.

"Isn't Monsieur Cleve with you?" he inquired after Guy had seated himself.

"Somewhere in the palace, *Monsieur le duc.*"

The duke nodded. He appeared strangely restive. It showed in his eyes, his twitching fingers. He strove to control it. He said: "I see," and steepled the fingers to keep them still. "While one of you questions, the other observes. A good policy, *monsieur,* especially in this nest. We are enduring great difficulties in Montferrat. That is why I sent for you." He nodded into the future.

Guy tried to use it as a cue. "So I understand. Last evening *Monsieur le colonel* explained—"

But Vincent wasn't listening. He was staring straight ahead, eyes contemplative, worried. "The robberies are but an instance, *monsieur.* One of many riddles. For example, have you noted the number of idlers in Casale—armed vagabonds, military-appearing men with apparently nothing to do?"

Guy hadn't, but he decided against admitting it. He looked wise and allowed the duke to continue.

"Another peculiarity, *Monsieur le comte,* is the sudden unrest of the populace. Until recently my subjects were contented, almost docile. Now they murmur and band on street corners to listen to rabble-rousing orators. I believe—"

He stood up and fell to pacing in short nervous arcs. Guy bit his lip and eyed Duke Vincent curiously. Something was eating into the man's mind—something other than the subject under discussion. Finally, Vincent continued.

"The people are being stirred up by someone, *monsieur.* A force of evil has invaded my realm. 'Tis strange but only my trusted aides seem in danger. M. de Boussey has thrice been fired upon. Despartes, my physician, has narrowly escaped poisoning. And Henri, my son—" He broke off abruptly and sat down. "My ward informs me that a killer has arrived in the city. A bravo named Mazo Gardier."

Guy nodded. "Cleve and I know of Mazo Gardier, *Monsieur le duc,*" he said. "I can assure you that there is nothing to fear from him."

"Really? Well, *monsieur,* perchance you'll be interested to know that last night this very Gardier had the effrontery to attempt an entrance of the palace. I fear any man who possesses such cold nerve. It might carry him further than the daring of an ordinary rogue."

Guy chuckled. "That wasn't Gardier," he said. "The real Gardier is dead—slain before he ever reached Casale."

"Are you positive, *monsieur?* The man last night was carrying a ruby-hilted blade, and my information clearly states that Gardier—"

"Cleve has Gardier's weapon," Guy interposed simply.

DUKE VINCENT paused. "I see." Then he stood up again, crossed to the wall and jerked a bell-cord. "I have not been able to eat, *monsieur.* Perhaps you will be kind enough to dine with me." He returned to his chair, patted Guy lightly on the shoulder. "I am relieved that you and Cleve are here. I have heard of your competence."

Guy frowned. *"Merci."* He hesitated, and then blurted the thing which was on his mind. "You are troubled, *monsieur,* aren't you?"

Vincent's gray eyes hardened swiftly. *"Corbac!* Do not be ridiculous young man. I am—" Then he wilted suddenly. *"Oui,* d'Entreville, you are right. I am troubled—deeply troubled." He paused, moistened his lips thoughtfully and straightened in his chair. He regarded Guy with a fleeting plea for understanding, and then began.

"As a representative of the Crown, *monsieur,* you have a right to this news, for it concerns the future of this duchy. My son, Henri de Casale, heir to the principality of Montferrat, this morning has murdered his mistress!"

Before Guy could reply, the speaker proceeded. "Candidly, *monsieur,* in other times the crime might not mean too much. I am speaking now, of course, as a sovereign—a cold-minded diplomat, *monsieur,* and not as a father."

"I understand."

"Bien. As I have said, in other times the deed would not merit consideration. Henri is a duke's son, above the law. But with the people restless, Henri unpopular, and traitors rampant, his crime might act as the spark to set off civil disturbances which would be disastrous."

Guy was startled by the implications. He leaned forward. "Have things progressed that far, *monsieur?*"

Vincent shrugged. He seemed like a weary, almost hopeless old man. He said: "Maybe. I don't know. With troop morale low and this cursed undercurrent of intrigue washing away the very foundations, it is not possible to predict anything. But I fear the worst."

The French cavalier stood up, still leaning forward. He knew only one answer for revolution. "Troops," he declared. "If what you fear is true, then Montferrat needs troops! A regiment! A whole army if need be. The Cardinal must be notified."

"He has been, *Monsieur le comte.* Accompanying the wage-wagons next week will be three thousand soldiers under Marshal Menehoulde. I have just received word."

"Bien. And now, *Monsieur le duc,* perchance we can get down to a few names which may lead the way to—"

A respectful knock upon the door interrupted them. Duke Vincent turned.

It was le Sieur de Maupin, this time garbed in green with a froth of lace cascading his shoulders. "You will pardon this intrusion, Your Highness," he said. "Capitaine de Merion, officer of the watch, desires to inform you that the assassin, Mazo Gardier, has been apprehended. He is now safely chained in a cell, awaiting your pleasure."

The duke regarded Guy askance. "Did you not say that Richard Cleve was wearing Gardier's ruby-hilt, *monsieur?*"

Guy nodded, eyes dancing. Here was his opportunity. "That's right," he chuckled. *"Sangodemi!* And you have arrested him!" Then he began to laugh, pausing only long enough to choke out: "With your permission, *monsieur,* I would care to handle his release."

Vincent nodded, frowning. He couldn't understand why a comrade's imprisonment should cause merriment. "Very well, *monsieur,*" he agreed.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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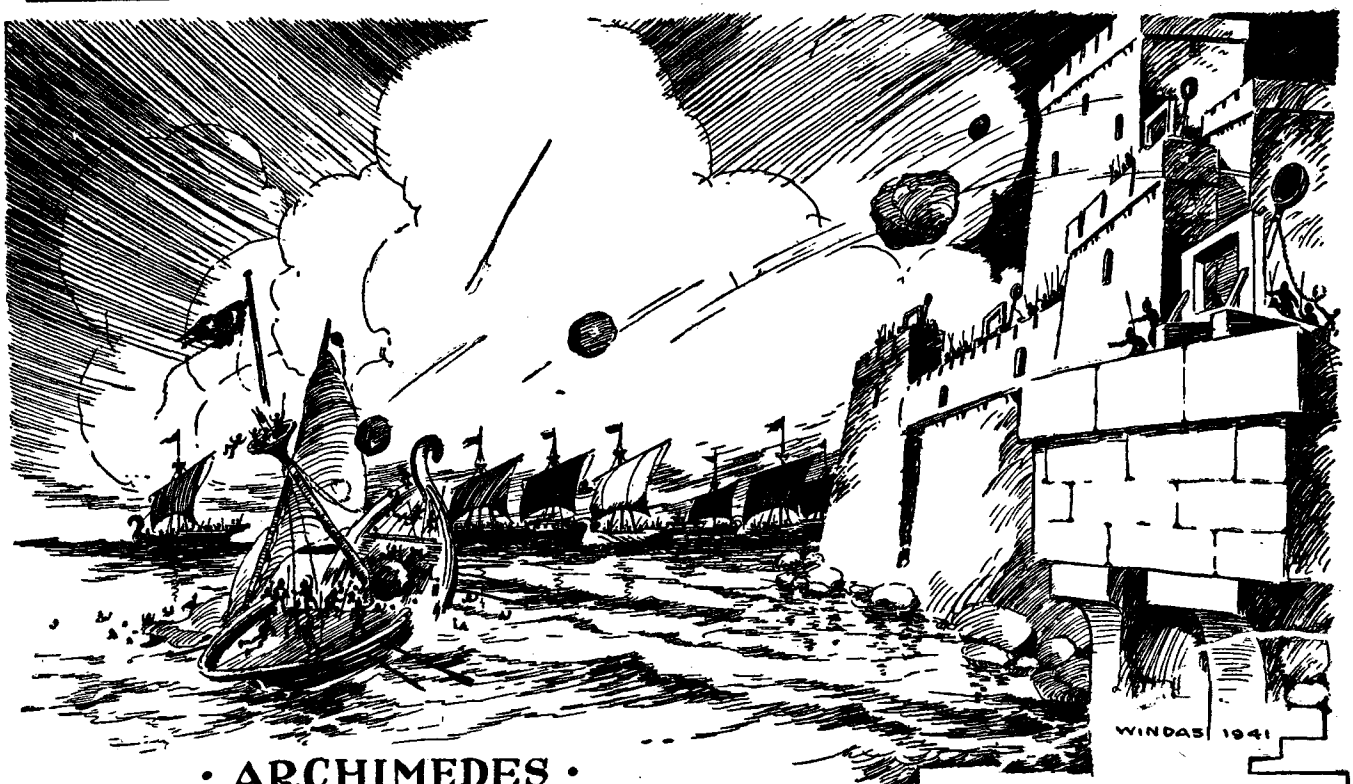
LEGENDS of the LEGIONARIES

:ORIGINS·OF·THE·CUSTOMS·AND·SAYINGS·OF·THE·FIGHTING-MEN: by W.A.WINDAS



· ARCHIMEDES ·

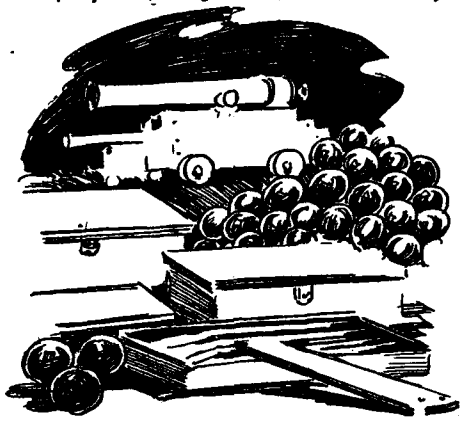
Although no soldier himself, Archimedes was the father of all artillerymen. He designed many weapons for defense of Syracuse against the Romans. By skilled use of triangulation, he enabled catapult crews to score hits at incredible ranges, and kept the Roman fleet at a distance. Syracuse was finally taken, however, from the land side.

·The POINTED SWORD·

While all ancient nations used swords, most preferred the pointless "chopper" type. The Romans, however, soon learned the true advantage of the thrust, and beat the others for 1000 years.

·CAPTURE of BELGRADE·

The Yugoslav capital has been the scene of much historic fighting. Once it fell under Turkish domination for 160 years, all for lack of $24.00. (The city's rulers bought plenty of ammunition, but could not raise the extra money needed to pay shipping charges to Belgrade.)



·NAPOLEON'S FIFTH COLUMN·

Napoleon enticed the soldiers of conquered nations into his service by offering better food than that of the defeated army. The French ration, while poor by modern standards, was excellent for the period, and seems to have been responsible for an effective "fifth column".

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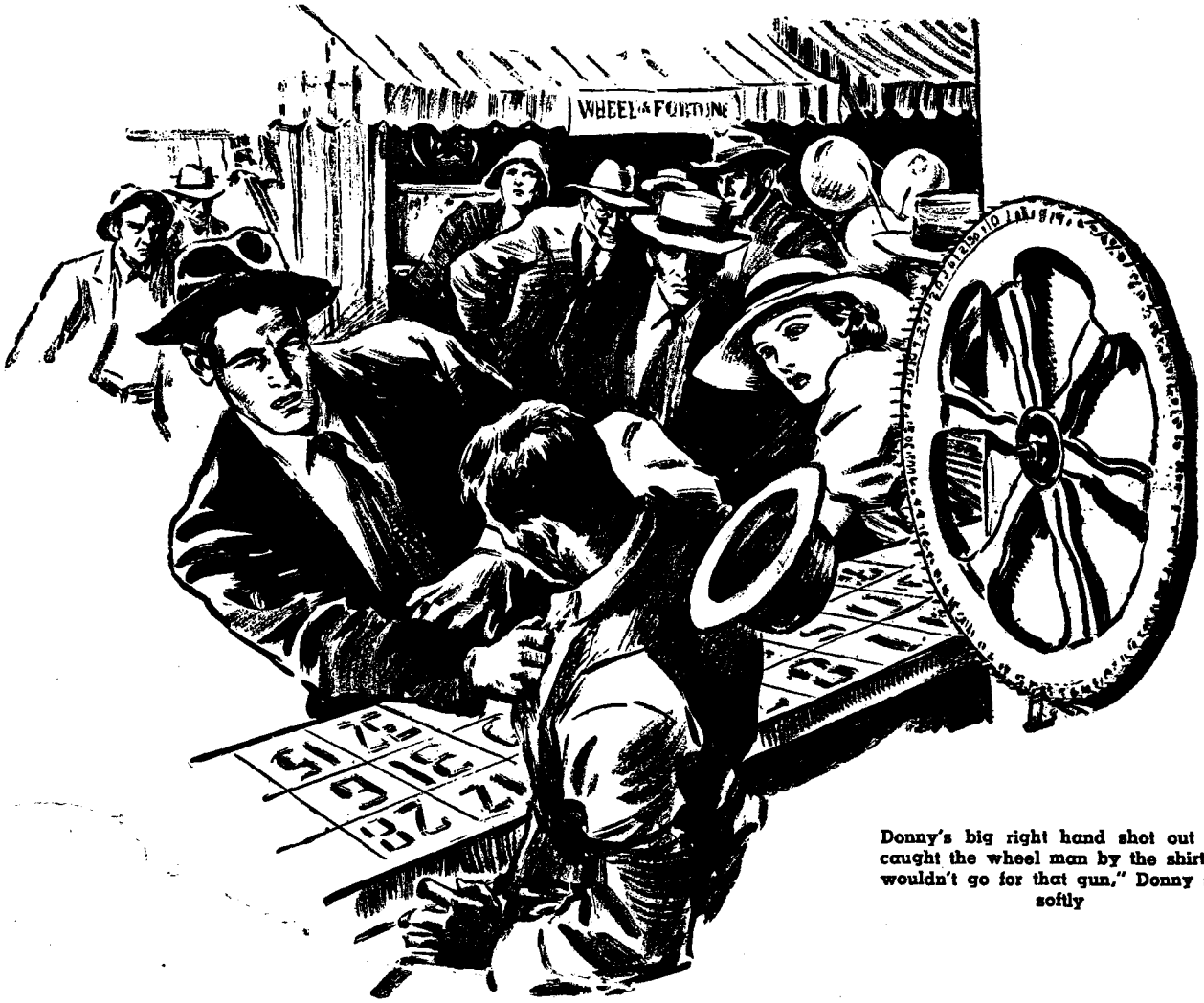

Donny's big right hand shot out and caught the wheel man by the shirt. "I wouldn't go for that gun," Donny said softly

As Long as the River

By Thomas W. Duncan

Author of "When the Wind Blows," "Cable to Tahiti," etc.

The log-rafts were gone, and the river boats, and the brawling feuds of that brave era. But while two men still fought the old way, the raftsman's code could not die

SOMETIMES in those days you could still see a stray steamboat tied up at Broken Ax, but mostly the river flowed empty of traffic. The log-rafts were gone. The packets were nearly gone; and that night when Donny McDermott came back he traveled by the evening local.

He'd been gone a dozen years—west, north, any old place where he could add to his pile—and when he strode down Front Street he thought maybe a boom had hit the town, there were so many people.

Now and then he recognized some face dimly, but nobody knew him. He'd cleared out at fourteen, and the years had muscled him up considerably. He stood over six feet tall now, with the shoulders and lean stomach and powerful legs that a man that big should have. A generation before he would have been a raftsman. Built for it. He had a raftsman's disposition, too, when he let himself go.

"What's happening?" he asked the clerk in the Commercial House. "Did they strike gold here?"

The clerk said he hadn't smelled any gold in that town. "If you mean all the people," he aded, "it's the carnival they've come in for."

Donny asked, "Does old man Matthews still run the Rivermen's bank?"

"Fred Matthews? Sure, he still runs it. Do you know him?"

"I used to."

Donny tried to keep the hate out of his voice when he talked about Fred Matthews. He'd waited a long time to come back and even things up, but he was going to play the game cold and smooth. He'd never end anywhere except in the jug if he tried rough-housing. Rough-housing had gone out on the Upper Mississippi along with the packets. . . .

After supper, he moved along Front Street, sizing up

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the town. It had shrunk. Not actually, of course; it was just that he'd seen a lot of country since he ran away.

The carnival had pitched itself on some flat land between the street and the river. It seemed pretty tame to Donny, but then he'd been in Dawson in '98. He edged into a crowd around a booth where a man was running a wheel. He'd seen that game before, on the Klondike. Only up there they would have thrown you out if you'd tried to bet a dime. They would have thought you were trying to bet pins, up there.

He watched the game for quite a spell. One player, a girl, he watched especially, because she was very easy on the eyes. The crowd kept jostling and shifting, as any crowd will do, and pretty soon he was standing next to her. She was so interested in betting that she didn't even notice him; leastwise, she didn't appear to. But about those things, you could never be sure.

On the counter, hollow squares with numbers inside were painted, and encircling the wheel there were sections with corresponding numbers. And the sections were divided into compartments paying four to one, six to one, ten to one.

But the girl didn't have much luck. She'd put a dime first on one square and then another, but the luck always hit somebody else. She'd never done much of this, Donny guessed. She had a mighty fine profile and sweet mouth, and her hair was brown. She was a nice town girl, Donny figured, who was kicking over the traces tonight and finding the going rough.

Ordinary thing, he didn't go around shoveling out free-of-charge advice. And later he looked back and knew he should have kept his trap shut, that night. He had a soft-spoken tongue when he wanted, as if maybe there was a gentle part of him buried deep somewhere that he could tap into when he had the need.

"If I was you, kid," he said, "I'd pick a number and stick there. I wouldn't go hopping all over the northwest territory, if I was you."

MAYBE at that she had never known he existed till he spoke. She looked up at him very quick, and he saw that her face was even prettier, full view. Brown eyes. He'd always been a sucker for brown eyes, in a doe deer or in a woman.

Then she grinned a little, and that gave her a dash of salt and pepper that he liked. She looked a couple of years older and wiser when she grinned—twenty, say, instead of seventeen or eighteen.

"Thanks," she said.

She put a dime on six and didn't win. But she stuck with six and next time the wheel paid her four to one. Then she lost once, but the next spin paid her six to one. She lost twice again in a row, and after that the odd thing happened. The wheel's pointer clicked to a halt between the pegs marking off the ten-to-one compartment; but just as it stopped Donny saw the wheel man shift his weight, as if he'd moved his foot, and the pointer jumped into the four-to-one compartment.

The wheel man paid four.

The girl said, "But you owe me a dollar. It stopped there. Then you moved it."

"No squawks, sister," the wheel man said. "Take it as it comes."

Which was no way for a gambler with a gimmicked wheel to speak to a lady. And she was that; you could always tell.

Donny moved almost gently, planting his palms on the counter and leaning over, and he spoke softly, the way a man could afford to when he had plenty behind his words.

"Mister," he said, "you'd best fork over."

The wheel man had a ratty little temper. Or maybe he was snowed up. Or maybe he just had indigestion. Anyhow, his hand started for his armpit, but Donny's big right hand floated out very easy and caught him by the shirt collar, and Donny's left fingers clamped over the man's right wrist.

"I wouldn't, mister," he said, so low and confidential that you couldn't have heard him ten feet away. "It would make a lot of noise," Donny said.

He acted a lot by hunch in those days, and when the hunch came that it was all right to do so he let the wheel man go. The man's mouth was drawn very tight and angry, but he paid over the other six dimes.

"Now get out," he snapped.

Donny didn't even say, "Sure, I've been thrown out of better places than this." He let the wheel man have the last word. Knocking around, you learned it was important to let everyone save his face. Donny had that calm, reasonable streak about everybody except old man Matthews. When it came to Fred Matthews, he was a little loco.

THEY halted in the crowd; the girl smiled. "I guess I owe you part of that sixty cents."

"I guess you do," he said. He wouldn't have taken it on a platter, but he was sparring to find out what kind she was.

She laughed, and he added:

"You could take me riding on that ferris wheel and we'd call it square."

She was a game one; never batted an eye. You'd thought it ordinary for a girl to buy the tickets. It was a tall wheel, and the carnival looked pretty from up there—all shadows and splashes of light from the banjo-flares. When the ride ended he bought tickets for another. Up there, the river wind blew her hair, and she looked like something that wouldn't have puckered a man's mouth to kiss.

Gradually, she edged the conversation around to who he was. She guessed he was a stranger in that town.

"Born and raised here," he said. "Then when I was fourteen my dad was killed, and I run off. Afraid they'd clap me into an orphan's home."

"Where'd you go?"

"Places you've never seen, kid. Places you'd never want to see. I was big for my age—that helped. And I learned to fight. There was a promoter in Frisco took me in and learned me to fight scientific. I'd done anything in those days for three square meals.

"Were you hungry, a lot?"

"At first. Later on I went to Alaska. That gold rush was something to see, kid. Most of them come back to the States, after the first winter. But I stuck it out, account of I had nothing to come back to. I did all right. Didn't make a million, but I ain't complaining."

The ferris wheel stopped to take on passengers and left them dangling away up at the top. The girl looked off toward the river. It was like black marble tonight, with lights winking far away over in Wisconsin.

"Your name wouldn't be McDermott?" she asked.

"For twenty-six years—Donny McDermott."

"Then maybe you'll want to toss me overboard. My name's Jane Matthews."

It came back to him in a rush. Fred Matthews had a daughter, but when he ran off she'd been just a little kid. He'd rather this girl had kicked him in the teeth than tell him she was Jane Matthews.

She said, "Dad always wondered what happened to you. He wouldn't have seen you go to an orphan's home."

Talk was cheap; nothing cheaper. He guessed he would have stood up and stalked away, except that wheel had them dangling away up high. He could feel all those years of hate inside him, so black and blind that it scared him, sometimes. But now his hate and rage were frozen up, like ice jamming the Yukon. He was surprised to hear his voice so calm, but a river was calm, too, locked in ice. But the time always came when the ice went out.

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"I was playing one-o'-cat that afternoon," he said. "Jimmy Griffith came running from downtown. 'Donny, your pa's been killed,' he yelled. 'Fred Matthews killed your pa.' "

Slowly, she shook her head. "Don't you ever believe it, Donny. Dad hit your father on the chin with his fist. He went down, but it wasn't that that killed him. The coroner said it wasn't that. Your father had a bad heart, Donny, and the coroner said it was the excitement of the fight that killed him."

Maybe. And maybe not. Talk was cheap for a coroner, too, especially with Fred Matthews the richest man in town. Donny wished he could hate her, the same as her dad, but he couldn't, quite. Just as well, maybe, because he'd planned to play the thing smooth. To come back and pretend he had no hate for Matthews; to throw him off guard; then strike. That wasn't how he would have chosen to fight, but the rules had changed on the upper river since the log-raft days. You had to fight smooth and crafty nowadays, else they'd throw you in the jug.

So he made himself smile, and he said, "I guess that's water a long time over the dam. I guess that happened in another century and we'd best forget it."

He didn't like the feeling that crept over him when he said that. Lying made him feel sneaky; he'd never been a lying man. But the law wouldn't let you fight fair and open any more.

She gave him a smile so pretty that it twisted him up inside.

"Water over the dam, Donny. That way is best."

They left the wheel at the end of that ride. He threw some baseballs and won her a kewpie doll, and they rode the merry-go-round. She was a light-hearted girl; she went at everything with relish. That was the kind of woman a man could have stood to have around, excepting she was Matthews's daughter.

THE Rivermen's State Bank occupied the ground floor of a three-story brick building, and next morning Donny went there. It looked kind of seedy. There were a good many things Donny knew more about than banking, but he'd heard that no bank ever kept all its deposits on hand, in cash money. He'd heard you could close a bank, if you started a run. And if the banker had been crooked or even if his judgment had been bad the bank would stay closed.

In his office Fred Matthews was sitting with his back to a window overlooking the river, and Donny would never have known him. He'd shaved off his mustache and his hair had turned white. But he was still a solid giant of a man, like the river bluffs.

He never stirred when Donny tramped in; just sat watching with cold eyes while the chair creaked under Donny's weight.

"I guess," Donny said, "you don't know me."

"I guess that's where you're wrong. You've got your dad's look. What do you want?"

Donny unfolded the check he had drawn and shoved it across the desk. It was on a St. Louis bank, for a thousand dollars.

Matthews picked it up. His hands were still big, with thick, round fingers. But they were old hands now; brown-mottled, stiff, the power drained out of them.

"You must not have done so bad," he said, scowling at the check.

"There's a lot more where that came from. I want to start an account. Checking."

"I heard you'd come back. What do you aim to do here?"

Donny grinned. He guessed maybe Matthews was uneasy. He spoke softly.

"Look around. Rest up."

"You don't look like a man who needs a rest cure."

"No," Donny said, "I guess I don't."

Matthews creaked back in his swivel chair. "My daughter tells me she met you last night. Says she's going to see you again this afternoon. Your dad and I rafted a lot of logs in our day. Partners. Couple of fighting fools. There wasn't a town on the river where people didn't lock their doors when a log-raft tied up."

"So I've heard tell."

"It was the raftsmen against the townies—against the world. We had to be tough, to take a thousand-foot raft down the channel. I know your blood, McDermott. I recall how them dance-hall girls at Dorkin's Landing always fought over your dad."

While he spoke, Matthews pulled open a drawer and took out a revolver. He didn't offer to point it at Donny; he just examined it while he talked.

"And I think it's best to mention that Jane ain't a dance-hall girl. Always have said I'd shoot the pants off any man who treated her like one." He put the revolver away and closed the drawer. "It's been pleasant seeing you again," he said.

Donny stood up. It was a good thing he'd told himself so often that he had to play the game smooth, else he might have wrecked that office. His hate made his voice husky and his temper made it quaver, but he smiled.

"I've met dance-hall girls, too," he said. "Up north. A man would have to be a fool to mistake Jane for one of them."

THOSE next days were the best he'd ever encountered. He'd never known anything like them; never had felt that way before. He guessed that days like that and a woman like her were what all men were working to get, even if they didn't realize it. He guessed he'd struck it richer than ever old Mike Haggarty had with the Bear Mountain lode, only this was the kind of gold a man could never find in the ground.

Late at night he'd lie in his hotel room and think back over those hours with her. They'd gone to the carnival a couple of more times, and in the afternoons they'd explored the bluffs. Those were high bluffs, marching from north to south along the west bank of the river like a procession of gigantic elephants. They'd found Signal Point, a high outcropping of rock where you could see for endless miles over into Wisconsin. Maybe you'd see a freight train puffing along across the green patchwork of country, looking like a tiny string of toys.

At Signal Point one afternoon she said, "Sometimes I think you and Dad hate each other."

For a minute that spoiled everything. That reminded him of what he'd come near to forgetting when he was with her.

"I don't know your dad very well. But I liked him that morning in the bank."

It was a wonder he didn't choke on a whopper like that. Lying came very unnatural to his tongue.

She gazed up at him steadily. "You should know him better, Donny. Will you come to supper tomorrow night?"

He'd walked right into it; had to say yes. Her face lighted when he said it; they were standing very close; his hunch was that he could kiss her if he wanted; and in those days he was a hunch-following man. Kissing her was as if a river current had grabbed him and carried him far, tumbling him over and over.

"Oh, Donny," she said.

He looked down at her. "Kid, it looks like we're in love."

"That's what it looks like," she said.

"It's pretty fine," he said. " Finer than silk. It's like a dream."

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ALL the next day he dreaded that supper, but it started out all right. When he knocked at their big house on Grant Street, Matthews himself opened the door and thrust the door and thrust out his hand.

"Come in, Donny. Glad to see you," he said heartily.

The victuals on the table Jane had cooked herself, and they chewed mighty easy. About the best grub Donny had ever tasted; and Fred Matthews said it beat all hollow the grub he and Joe McDermott used to get on the log-rafts. In the living-room after the meal Matthews fell into a recollecting mood about the old days. He even dug up an old picture, brown with time, that a traveling photographer had taken of him and Joe McDermott.

Donny's father didn't look much older than Donny was now—big, sinewy, grinning, hell-bent. It put Donny in mind of how his father had been in those later years, so broken and liquor-logged, sitting for hours at a stretch staring at the river, with its ghosts. All burned out and rusted, like an abandoned steamboat boiler.

"Great days," Matthews was saying. "But then I started the bank, turned respectable. Too bad Joe McDermott took the other path."

Donny could feel it working inside him, that hate. His nerves and sinews felt racked. But his voice was level.

"That ain't quite the story Dad told. Dad said he'd saved five hundred dollars, and you borrowed it and bought some white-pine options in Wisconsin. You cashed in right on that deal, and that's how you got your start."

The room went deathly silent. In the next block a dog was barking, and a whistle wailed from down along the river. But it would be a locomotive, not a steamboat, on account of the steamboats were mostly to hell and gone.

Matthews said, "Joe McDermott always was the biggest liar between here and St. Paul."

The skin over Donny's knuckles was white; with an effort he opened his fists. Couldn't rough-house any more.

"Joe told that story so often he likely believed it himself," Matthews added. "Years after it was supposed to have happened he worked himself up to jump on me on the street. I hit him. But it wasn't that that killed him. It was his heart."

Donny stood up.

"Folks," he said quietly, "there's been a little mistake. I come back to get even with you, Matthews, and that's what I aim to do."

He turned and walked out of the room, out of the house. On the front walk he stopped, for Jane was running after him, calling for him to wait.

"Kid," he said, "get it through your head. You were just another pickup to me. Just another bit of fluff and lace."

He'd have a hard time forgetting how her face looked, so white and sick in the light from the street lamp. He pivoted and strode away fast, down to Front Street, to Hesson's blind-pig pool hall. He went grinning into the place through the white tobacco smoke and stood with his legs apart.

"Boys," he said, "the drinks are on me."

Somebody said, "Looks like you've had near enough to drink already."

Funny remark; he hadn't had a nip for days.

HIGH morning sun shafting through the window of his hotel room wakened him. He was lying on the floor, dressed. Mouth felt as if an Indian had slept in it; head felt split open with an ax.

He knew what he had to do. He had to leave town. There was a lot of country he'd never seen, and maybe if he saw enough he'd forget there'd ever been a girl named Jane Matthews. "Sure thing, kid," he thought, "I'll forget you. Maybe."

As for getting even with Matthews—well, he'd spoiled that by tipping him off. Just as well. He felt years older this morning and he could look back and think that his scheme of returning here and getting even had been boyish. It was a hangover from kid days when he'd day-dreamed about revenge on the man who killed his dad. But one man couldn't get revenge on another actually. If a man had done wrong life took its own revenge.

He swayed up, packed his grip. There was the matter of getting his thousand out of the bank, but he'd do it quietly. At the noon hour, when Matthews was home eating. He never wanted to see Matthews again.

Late that morning he dropped into Hesson's for a pick-me-up, and after the courthouse clock sent twelve bongs floating through the still noon air he emerged and started for the bank. Halfway there, he saw Fred Matthews coming out of a grocery store. Donny stopped, turned around to avoid him. But Matthews called:

"McDermott!"

The blood was high in Matthews's face. He was carrying a bag of groceries, but he just dropped it to the sidewalk and strode over and clutched Donny's shirt.

"I know now," he said, "how you fight. You came back and made Jane fall in love with you. Then walk out on her. That's how you fight."

"Matthews," Donny said, "I wish you was thirty years younger. Then I'd—"

But before Donny could finish Matthews's fist smacked him on the chin. Not much of a wallop. An old man like that couldn't pack much. But it caught Donny unprepared, and his legs were uncertain anyhow with the liquor, and it sat him down on the sidewalk.

A half-dozen men had appeared, as always when there was trouble. Two of them grabbed hold of Matthews, to stop the fight.

"Like his dad," Matthews said. "Always laying drunk on the sidewalk."

Donny got up. Grinned.

"Boys," he said, slow and easy, "Jane Matthews tipped me off last night. The old man's bank's about all in, boys. I've got a thousand there, and when the old man heard I was drawing it out he smacked me."

Then Donny marched along the street to the bank and drew out the whole thousand. As he stood there counting those bills, two or three men came in and drew out theirs.

DONNY sat in the hotel lobby, staring blindly through the plate-glass windows. He didn't feel so good. He should have felt proud of his control, for when Matthews smacked him he hadn't rough-housed at all. He'd played it smooth. When Matthews made that crack about his dad all those years of hate had flamed like a heap of black powder touched by a match, and now his anger had gone up in smoke.

The liquor had left him too, and he felt all caved-in. Tonight he would take the nine o'clock train out of town, but he didn't know where he was going. Away. Just away.

Hearing the courthouse clock bong three times, he creaked to his feet and drifted outside. There were a lot of people in town. Word about the bank had spread; bad news traveling fast. On the night when he hit town there'd been a lot of people too, only they were carnival-bound and laughing. These people were different. These people were grim.

He stopped in the hot, still sunlight across the street from the bank. Waiting to get their money, a cue of people stood on the sidewalk. Dully, Donny stared at them. There were old ladies clutching their bankbooks in gnarled fingers, and kids. Donny's lips were dry; he swallowed.

Then the glass door of the bank glittered and Fred Matthews was standing on the top step. His white hair was rumpled; he looked tired and old.

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"Everybody get this," he said. "This bank's not broke by a long shot, but you've cleaned us out of currency. We'll have plenty here from Chicago in the morning, and you can get your money then. But we're closing now till morning."

He stepped back inside and flashed shut the door. The crowd murmured. Donny tramped back to the hotel. Went upstairs to his room and then came right back down. He was mighty restless all that afternoon; couldn't stay put; and the supper hour came without his eating, on account of he wasn't hungry. Maybe he'd never be hungry again. Maybe he'd never know peace again, excepting from whiskey. That was what he needed, a drink. He left the lobby, ending up in Hesson's.

The place was crowded. He shouldered through the foul air and told Hesson he wanted a drink.

"Stick around for the fun," Hesson grinned. "Bunch of the boys are going up to Matthews's house after awhile. He'll look real pretty ridin' a rail."

Donny stared at Hesson. His face was moon-round, moon-red, beaded with sweat.

"Them raftsmen always was holy terrors," Hesson added. "Well Fred Matthews is the last raftsman, and we're going to fix him."

Donny pushed the drink back across the counter. "No," he said, "Matthews ain't the last raftsman. I'm the last."

Hesson chuckled. "You're drunk, Donny."

But he wasn't. He was cold sober. He strode out of Hesson's and his heels snapped along the sidewalk of Front Street, of Grant Street. He climbed the steps of Matthews's porch and, finding the screen unlatched, walked right in. Matthews and Jane jumped up as he strode into the living-room.

"Put down that shotgun, Fred," he said. "You ain't the last raftsman. I am. Raftsmen fight among themselves but they fight against the world."

"I guess," Matthews said, "you're drunk."

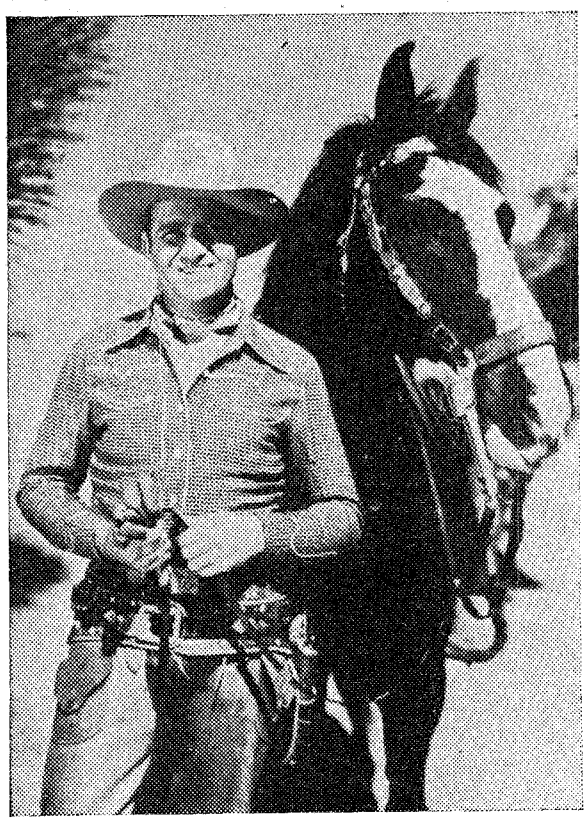
"I guess I'm not." Donny pulled out the envelope with that thousand in bills, tossed it to the table. "There's a mob coming after while," he said. "Pay 'em off with that. I've got a lot more in St. Louis. We can send for that tomorrow, if your bank's in a bad way."

Matthews said, "The bank's all right, Donny. But they caught us short of cash."

"If you've got another gun, get it," Donny said. "We'll wait on the porch. I know that crowd. Let 'em catch sight of a gun and they'll never stop running."

Matthews went upstairs to fetch a rifle. Jane and Donny were alone. All at once Donny had the hunch he could kiss her if he tried; and he was a hunch-following man.

GENE AUTRY



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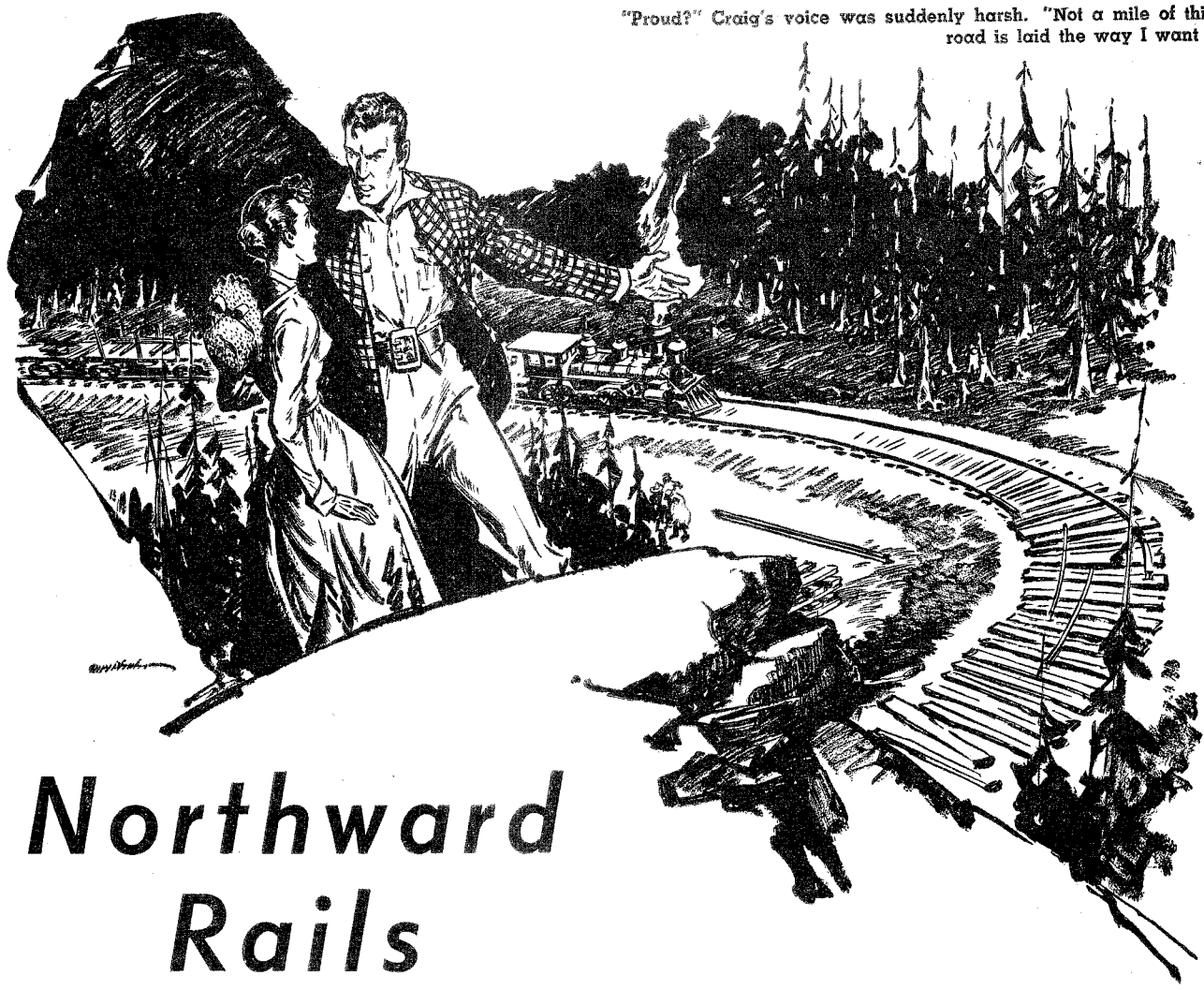

"Proud?" Craig's voice was suddenly harsh. "Not a mile of this road is laid the way I want it"

Northward Rails

By Frank Bunce

WHEN JEFFREY CRAIG arrives in the little Wisconsin settlement of Lakehead in June, 1855, he intends to build a railroad—and is plunged at once into a knock-down, drag-out fight. For WILLIAM BARSTOW, a crooked manipulator, has already persuaded the settlers to invest in a line he proposes to build, paralleling Craig's own right of way.

Barstow wants that right of way, extending three hundred and fifty miles north to the shore of Lake Superior, because it involves a chance at the biggest land grant in the history of the Northwest. And after running into trouble with his survey, Craig is persuaded to accept Barstow's proposition; to trade Craig's charter for that of the Kaukalin and Western, a line branching northeast from his present line of survey.

With the trade Barstow promises to let Craig use three thousand tons of rail iron, owned by the "people's" railway, for construction on the K. & W. But after laying rail from Junction City, eighty miles south, to a few miles north of Lakehead, Barstow tells the investors that the road has run out of capital and must reorganize. According to law this releases the road from its obligation to Craig for the rail iron—and Craig is holding the bag.

Or so Barstow thinks. But when the people's road is put up for sale, with the expectation that Barstow's group will buy it back again, Craig himself bids in and takes the road for a little over half a million dollars.

Craig hasn't that much money and can't get it; but at the last possible minute he bluffs Barstow into giving it to him—for the K. & W. And when Barstow arrives at the junction to protect his new property, he finds that Craig has already stripped it of rails, sleepers—everything movable—and piled them on his own right of way.

IT'S a trick for Craig; but his troubles are just beginning. He owns a railroad under construction—the Wisconsin Northern, formerly the people's railroad—but he desperately needs money to complete it. And his brother EBEN, a Boston banker, is unable to furnish that money.

Eben does have information, however. An unscrupulous group of investors called the Mortgage Receivers' Association of Chicago has been selling mortgages on Wisconsin farm land—first given by the people for their own road—and buying them back again cheap. Eben thinks that Barstow is connected with this group. . . . Yet Barstow, at the same time, is encouraging the farmers to resist foreclosure.

At Eben's suggestion, Jeffrey Craig goes to see STEVENSON, the iron man, who is trying to collect something like a million dollars for iron sold to the people's railway group through Barstow. Most of this iron—almost enough to complete the Wisconsin Northern—has disappeared; and Stevenson warns Craig that the man who has it will be guilty of grand larceny.

Craig is determined to get that iron for his own use, and finally locates it in an obscure spot on the shore of Lake Michigan. With a crew of men he gets the barges of rails in tow upriver; and through a series of clever dodges eludes a detective Stevenson has sent.

The line of fight is now clearly drawn. Backing Craig are MIKE SLANE, an old friend who has wrangled his way into the Wisconsin state senate; and young TOM DURSTINE, the surveyor. Against him are Stevenson, who wants his rail iron; Barstow, who is determined to plunder the virgin Northwest; and Barstow's stooges: LUKE GRANVILLE, Madison banker, and MILT WYCLIFFE, publisher of Lakehead's paper.

This story began in the Argosy for July 12

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Dramatizing and accentuating the struggle between Craig and Barstow is lovely ANN WYCLIFFE, Milt's niece. The first investor in the people's railroad, she distrusts Craig, is fascinated by Barstow. But Craig has little time to worry about her; he has the iron he needs; now he must get it to where he can begin building. . . .

CHAPTER XXIV

RAT AT BAY

BY DAWN they had the barges groused well up over the county line; by noon moored not far from the stake line that marked the northern limit of their right of way. Craig sent the grouser back for the locomotive and flat cars and a small crew to break out the dam. With the rest of his men, he immediately started building railroad.

Until mid-summer he was able to bring up his supplies by water, but then the river fell so sharply that he was forced to establish an overland route, by supply train to the head of rails of the southern section, from there by wagon up the stake line.

Most of the settlers in the Winnebago basin saw that supply train going north on its maiden trip, and all of them felt a derisive pity for a man foolhardy enough to attempt conquering a wilderness from the rear. It was with incredulity that they saw it repeating the performance time and again through the weeks that followed, heard how the railroad was crawling nearer by thirty, by fifty, then by sixty miles.

Barstow, too, was caught by surprise. He spent the whole summer in the East, returning late in September, and Granville lost no time in summoning him to Madison to tell him what Craig had achieved. He had pushed his roadbed south as far as Long River, north, beyond Mena Creek, which were less than thirty miles apart.

The gap between his tracks was almost twice that, but he had three months to finish; and with his supply haul getting shorter every day, the hardest part of the job seemed behind him. Granville was frankly alarmed; but Barstow, though astonished, was imperturable.

"He's done well. Much better than I expected," he admitted. "But now that he's got the best part of his road built, it's time for us to take it away from him."

"How?" asked Granville.

"There are several ways. One is to send a few of our own men up to him as laborers."

"I've tried that. I sent him ten Gore picked for me. Good, husky men, fine at starting trouble and keeping it going. They were all back in three or four days. That was weeks ago, but some of them aren't over it yet."

Barstow frowned. "Well, you might try putting a little pressure on the inspectors. They could make him tear up and relocate every mile he's built."

"Bill," said Granville, "you don't seem to have read my letters as carefully as you ought. There are no inspectors any more."

"What's that?" Barstow jerked the cigar out of his mouth.

"It's been abolished. Mike Slane slipped the bill through when I wasn't looking. All that's left is a three-man commission, and their powers are limited to approving or rejecting a road when it's finished—when application is made for a land grant. And Bill, believe it or not, that commission can't be bought. I know. I've tried it."

BARSTOW sat scowling at his mutilated cigar. "This is a score for Craig. What about stirring up trouble through these mortgagors? Talk up their grievances, get them to go out and give Craig a battle."

"They haven't any grievances. None at least grievous enough to make them violent. That's Slane's work again. He keeps jamming through laws for their protection faster than the supreme court can declare them unconstitutional."

Barstow swore feelingly. "Slane! You'd think he was the whole legislature."

"He's nearly that. He's the slickest vote trader on the floor. And here's something else, Bill. He's smelling around our Mortgage Receivers' Association. He makes me nervous."

"Well, see to it that he does nothing more than smell." Barstow thought a while, then said: "What about Stevenson? You wrote that he had a judgment against Craig on an action in equity, and a warrant for his arrest on an action in law."

"He has, but what good is that to us? The judgment is against Craig, not his railroad, and the warrant can't be served until he comes out of the woods. And he won't do that until his road is finished."

"Then we'll have to contrive to bring him out."

"That's easier said than done. He has a crew of one hundred men up there that would die for him. An army couldn't get him out."

"Perhaps not an army. But one person might. A person he liked and would trust." Barstow rose. "Time I was leaving, if I'm to make connections to Lakehead. I want to look in on some of those mortgagors."

"Is that all you're going there for?" asked Granville.

There was a blunt insinuation in his tone, and Barstow turned to eye him steadily.

"No," he said, "I'm also going to look in on Ann Wycliffe. That's what you're asking, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Granville. "Bill, I'm not the man to mix into anyone's private affairs. You know that. But it's dangerous for you to keep on seeing her. Dangerous for all of us."

"Why?" said Barstow.

"Because of Milt. He doesn't like to have you with her, and I'm afraid you'll goad him into doing something about it."

"Doing what?"

"Telling her too much about us; or worse, telling someone else. I don't believe you understand his kind, Bill. He's no such simple character as, say, your bodyguard Jack Gore."

Barstow laughed contemptuously. "He's a miserable little worm. A snatch thief who will sell out for a few dollars; who has neither brains nor guts enough to hold for a price!"

"I know. But he's more, too. He's the black-sheep product of a fine family line, and you'll see another side of him come out if he's pushed too far, with the family honor at stake. He was about at the breaking point last fall, when you were making almost daily visits there, and now that you're back, he doesn't want them renewed. He's told me so."

"Has he?" said Barstow softly. "Well, I'll ask him to tell that to me—and then I'll give him an answer. I'll give him one that will shut him up for good."

"Bill, for Gods' sake—" began Granville, rising in alarm. But the other had gone, closing the door very precisely behind him.

HE WALKED into Wycliffe's clutttered office, at the back of his print shop, early next morning. In shirtsleeves, his puny body dwarfed by the big desk and big swivel chair that had been his heritage from his great-framed brother, the late judge, he looked even more futile, inconsequential than ever; and Barstow stood looking down at him with a frank contempt.

"I've been talking with Luke, Milt," he said. "He tells

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me you object to my seeing your niece. Is that right?"

Wycliffe grew green under the light of a smoky oil lamp; sweat started on his broad, full forehead that was the one good feature in an otherwise mean countenance. He was a badly frightened man, but he answered steadily: "Yes, that's right. I want you to keep away from her."

"Why?" said Barstow.

"Because I know you too well. I know you're scum. You were born scum, you're still scummy. But Ann doesn't know that. It wouldn't be a year before she'd find you out. But by then—"

Barstow struck him across the mouth. The blow was a back-handed slap that stifled Wycliffe's instinctive cry for help. He tried to rise; but Barstow forced him back, held him helpless with a series of deft blows intended to humiliate—sting, rather than maim his man—with their open-handed contempt. When he left off Wycliffe was sobbing hysterically and slumped like a gutted doll across an arm of the big chair.

Barstow took the man's chin in one hand, worked it back and forth until he stopped sobbing and sanity returned to his eyes. He said down to him: "Perhaps that will teach you not to call me names or threaten me. I'm not the man to be frightened away from anything I want. Don't try it again, or you'll get worse."

Wycliffe made no answer. He was still, unbreathing until the door had closed behind the other. Then his breath came outward in one great racking sob; but in his eyes was a flame of rage. He went to a grimy sink in a corner of the composing room and bathed his face, using a wet handkerchief as a compress to reduce some of the swellings.

Then he put on hat and coat, and walked to the depot to await a supply train that would take him south, toward Madison and Mike Slane.

CHAPTER XXV

WORD OF DISHONOR

BARSTOW, meantime, had gone to a livery stable for the brougham buggy and matched bays—the finest horse team in the country—that were reserved for him there the year around. He drove to Ann Wycliffe's house; and though he found her out of hoops and wearing a dust cap, it was significant of their easy intimacy that she received him with an unaffected pleasure, marred by no embarrassment.

"It's good to have you back," she said warmly. She looked him over critically, a friendly mockery in her clear grey eyes. "Someone has been feeding you well—better than I ever did. I'm positive you've put on weight."

"Perhaps," he said discontentedly. "But it wasn't food that fleshed me. I've been idle—chained—"

She said, with quick sympathy: "You weren't able to get anything settled, then, about the mortgages?"

"Nothing. But let's not talk of that. You'll hear it all at the mortgage meeting I've arranged at Grand Kaukalin this afternoon. That is, providing you'll come with me."

"I'd love it," she said promptly.

"Fine. Then you'd better start getting ready. But first, here's a little gift for you."

He gave her a small, flat package; and while she labored to unwrap it he watched her critically, wondering what it was about her that held him so. She was attractive enough; but ordinarily, he preferred easier conquests.

Perhaps it was that elusive quality called breeding that made itself evident in her every word and gesture, no mattter how commonplace. Perhaps it was that which he wanted to capture, so that he could break it in his hands, and see what it was made of. . . . She had the package opened, and was staring enchantedly at the gift it contained: an exquisite little gold watch, pendant from a jeweled pin.

"Oh, it's beautiful!" she said, then added doubtfully: "I'm afraid, though, it's too expensive—"

"Not at all. A few months ago, when they were a novelty, it might have been. But now— Here, let me show you how it's worn."

"Not now. Wait!" She flew away upstairs, and when she returned, she was slim, exquisitely lovely in billowing satin.

"Now," she said.

He fastened the watch to the bosom of her dress. He put his hands on her shoulders, lightly first, then with increasing appetite. Her head was bent, as she examined the watch with a frank delight; she was richly flushed, and her hair had a compelling scent. He kissed it, then when she lifted her head in surprise, he tried to kiss her mouth. But she drew away; not abruptly nor angrily, but with a curious troubled reluctance.

He released her. His impassive face gave no hint of the effort that cost him, of the flame that burned in him. He said, quite calmly: "This is the third time I've tried to kiss you. Three times in three years. And each time you've repulsed me."

"I'm sorry," she said. "You've been wonderfully kind and patient—"

"But you don't love me?"

"I don't know. I'm very fond of you. You're—"

"Wonderfully kind and patient?" he smiled, ruefully.

But the blow was not as severe as it might have been to a man of a less practical turn of mind. He was thinking that he had not come merely for kisses.

He said: "I want to put a question to you. I assure you I'm asking it not to embarrass you, or from wounded vanity, but because it has a bearing upon a request I may make of you. Are you in love with Jeffrey Craig"

He watched her closely, but her reaction was satisfactory. Her color rose, but she answered quietly, without bluster. "No. Why do you ask?"

"I'll tell you later. Perhaps on our way back from the meeting."

"That's cruel," she protested. "Now I'll be on pins all the way."

His smile, as he bowed her out to the waiting carriage, was not without malice. "I'm not the only one that's cruel."

ALONG the lake shore the air had a perfumed warmth that deceived even some spring flowers into attempting a second bloom; but farther on, where the woods closed in, it had the dank melancholy of fall. For a few miles they followed the railroad, and there the forests were pierced with occasional new, ragged clearings, set with cabins or tents or lean-to huts.

But when they swung eastward, following the Fox river valley, the picture changed startlingly. Here the clearings were older and bigger, and some of the houses were of frame; but many were deserted, and most of the others had a shabby, defeated look.

She said, puzzled: "I don't understand. Back there ten or twelve miles, people are settling, clearing new lands; but from here they're going away. Why is that?"

Barstow pointed with his whip to a low, grass-grown embankment crawling with them across the valley floor.

"That used to be a railroad. Craig's railroad," he said.

Even the village of Grand Kaukalin, which had survived two perilous centuries alone on the frontier, had a blighted look. The older structures, the toll house and mill house, the squared log homes of the river men, retained their look of ageless permanence; but a newer lane of stores and homes with their faces to the violated right of way already were decaying.

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Barstow made that blight the theme of his address to the three or four hundred persons gathered in a grove to hear him.

"You've seen in this valley what a railroad can mean to whole communities," he told them. "It gives them life, it takes their life away. I've spent eight months in the East, trying to get national legislation favorable to our cause. I failed, but I've come to the conclusion that it would have made little difference in the end; that the vital point is not so much who owns the titles to these lands, but who owns the railroads that serve them.

"If this man, Craig, is to be permitted to build roads only to destroy them, it makes little difference whether we own the land here, or someone else does. It will all go back to the Indians, anyhow."

There was an uneasy murmur from the crowd, and he added quickly: "Don't misunderstand me, please. I'm not suggesting that we give up our fight for our farms and homes. What I am saying is that we should be fighting on a larger front, for a permanent solution of our problems. Don't you agree?"

HE HAD expected assent, but not the kind of assent he received. Nathan Ely spoke from out of the crowd.

"I'm right with you on that," he said. "It's what a lot of us has been sayin' lately." He was urged up to the front and resumed from there: "Mebbe we oughta be glad we still got our homes. But a man can't help wantin' more than that. Most of the work he does on a new farm ain't done fer himself. Most of it don't bring him anything fer years—mebbe never will bring him anything. A lot of it's done fer his children an' his children's children; an' he wants to know he owns the place he's workin' on—makin', you might say—an' owns it honest."

"I'd think that you, at least, would be satisfied on that point. You bought and paid for your places, all of you," said Barstow. He found the interruption puzzling, vaguely ominous. He didn't see where it was leading.

"We bought 'em, but then we mortgaged 'em away. Gambled might be another way o' puttin' it. It's true we gambled against a crooked game, an' if that was all there was to it, I'd say hang on an' don't pay up—fight it out any way we kin.

"But it ain't that simple. Our mortgages were sold in the East, some to big bankers, but some to small investors with not much more money than we got. I don't like cheatin' 'em, legally or otherwise.

"I don't even like cheatin' a banker, if it means we got to keep up this fight fer years, never knowin' where we stand. I figure there ought to be some way to compromise, so that neither them nor us lose everything."

"Compromising on a proposition like this is likely to have unfortunate results," Barstow said. "Once we started to yield, our organization would begin to dissolve. It would be every man for himself, each trying to get the best terms he could, regardless of the others."

"It needn't. Not the way we'd figured. What we'd do is make a blanket offer to buy back all them mortgages at the price the present holders paid fer them, plus reasn'able interest from the date of purchase. They'd be bought from a common fund, an' they'd be the property o' the hull League until every mortgage was in, when they'd be destroyed.

"That would keep us together, instead o' weakenin' us, as might be the case if every man tried to buy them back fer himself. Gettin' the money might be hard, but no harder than gettin' more money to fight with."

IT WAS just such a plan as men with good level heads and honest instincts might conceive. It was the one plan that would have defeated the speculators and fairly reimbursed the honest investors who had held onto their securtities; and so nothing could have more dismayed Barstow, the biggest speculator of them all.

He concealed his alarm admirably, however, behind a sympathetic, reasonable reply:

"I quite understand why you want to give up this fight, Mr. Nathan. You're tired of it, as I am, as all of us are. But you're forgetting the terms on which those mortgages were granted. The money was to be put into the construction of a railroad that was to increase the value of our properties, pay off our indebtedness with its own revenues.

"Through no fault of our own, we failed; and another man—a greedy, predatory individual whom I need not name—took our road away from us. But—and here's what I started to tell you—we're going to get that railroad back! We're going to have it as our own again; and then we're going to do everything we said we'd at the beginning.

"We're going to finish it to the ore beds of Lake Superior; we're going to pay off our indebtedness in the only square, honest way there is, dollar for dollar, with the revenues it will bring us. And we're going to keep our country alive, not see it sink back into wilderness, through the destructive tendencies of one man!"

A rising cheer interrupted him. A score of voices demanded details. but Barstow shook his head smilingly.

"No. I'm sorry I can't confide in you fully. But you have my word that if you'll hang on for a couple of months, we'll have that railroad back."

"Your word's good enough for us, Bill," a man said; and the other echoed him.

CHAPTER XXVI

WALK A CROOKED MILE—

LATER, driving back to Lakehead with Ann, he was able to admire the skill with which he had blocked a dangerous proposal, made allies in his campaign to take the road back for himself. He would force out Craig, again acquire control of the railroad, again wreck it with waste, delays, artfully concealed theft; at the same time acquiring control, through his Mortgage Receivers' Association, of the best of the settled country through which it ran. At the end he would emerge as one of the most powerful men in the West, the undisputed master of a state big as the homelands of some world powers, and potentially much richer . . .

Ann's hand reached out through the twilight, to rest briefly, affectionately on his. She said: "You were wonderful. Now I know why all these people love you so."

She spoke with warmth and tenderness; and looking at her, he perceived that the moment was opportune for the proposal he had in mind. He sighed, said dolorously:

"I wish I could be sure they'd continue to love me. They wouldn't, you know, if I couldn't make good my promise to give them back that railroad."

She was startled. "But I thought from the way you spoke—"

"That it was all settled? Unfortunately, no. Everything depends upon one person. You."

"Me?" she said incredulously.

He nodded. "To get back that railroad, we have to get at only one person—Jeff Craig. With him out of the way, his project would collapse. I've kept posted on what's going on up there, and I know how critical his position is.

"He's about out of money, and not even that banker brother of his can get him any more. He's running short of rails; as I figure it, he lacks almost a thousand tons of having enough to finish, and he can't buy any more.

"It takes daily miracles to keep his crews supplied with food, tools, materials, all the thousand things they need,

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as well as to recruit fresh men to replace those who can't stand months away from saloons and cards and women.

"In spite of all this, Craig himself might get through; but take him away, and within forty-eight hours the work would be in a hopeless snarl, within a week at a standstill. He'd lose his land grant, the road would be sold again at receiver's auction, and we'd have it back for a song. There would be no other bidders."

"But where do I come in?" she asked.

Barstow disregarded the question. "Craig has handled things pretty shrewdly, on the whole. Starting with nothing, he made such a nuisance of himself that we had to buy him off with a branch line railroad; then he sold the branch line back to us for enough to buy our main line and, to boot, stripped the branch of everything of value. That was all very clever, inasmuch as it was all quite legal.

"But then he overreached himself. He stole six or seven thousand tons of iron, which a court had just ruled belonged to another man; and that's a serious offense, particularly in view of the kind of man he stole it from. Gavin Stevenson is fond of saying he is a just man; but his kind of justice is all of the eye-for-an-eye variety. He means to put Craig behind bars. And keep him there."

"I've heard that," she said. "But he can't be arrested before he has finished his railroad, can he?"

"Not as long as he stays with it, in unorganized territory, up north of the Lakehead county line, and west of Oconto county. But it has occurred to me that he might be induced to come out sooner."

SHE looked at him quickly, for the first time divining what he might be suggesting. He put a persuasive hand on hers. "Please listen to what I have to say. You'll be horrified at first, I know; but I believe you'll come to see that it's the only possible way to clear up this frightful mess that's threatening ruin to so many people—to the kind of people you saw today.

"I want you first to try to understand Craig. He's a ruthless, unprincipled adventurer; but he also has some of the instincts of a gentleman. And then he happens to be in love with you."

"What? Oh, no!" she said, startled.

"Yes, he is. I know from having watched him with you. It's of no consequence except as it has a bearing on what I'm going to ask of you. I want you to go to him. Tell him you came because your uncle and I were making things intolerable for you here, and you had no one else to turn to."

She was looking at him in amazement. "But why?"

"Because," he said, "he'll be considerably embarrassed. He knows no camp of his is any place for a decent woman, and he'll feel that you've compromised yourself in coming to him. He'll do what any man of some decent instincts, who is also in love with you, would do. He'll take you to the nearest settlement, with the purpose of marrying you.

"There is such a settlement, a few miles north of the County line, at Mena Creek—still in safe territory. What he won't know is that I'll be there, too, with men enough to take him the rest of the way in to a trial court, regardless of county lines—"

He faltered, stopped there, unnerved by the way she was looking at him. He had expected reluctance, shock; but he was not prepared for the sudden contempt with which she was regarding him.

"That's—despicable," she said, with a deliberate, cutting emphasis.

Barstow said: "I know. I don't like myself very well for having said it. It wasn't easy. But it happens that there are six or seven thousand people—worried, desperate people—looking to me for help, and I had to take the chance, even though I knew you might hate me for it. Please forget it, if you can."

He shook up the lines, and the handsome bays broke into the proud, long-legged trot that had made them the envy of every horse-lover in the country roundabout. For four or five miles they held the pace until he slowed them for the turn onto the old plank road running south to Lakehead. There Ann spoke, as he had known she would:

"If it were anything else—anything open and honest. But this—lying, betraying him—"

"He'd never know it was you who betrayed him. I'd make him think I followed you, laid in wait there. It's the least I could do for you."

Then went on a while in silence. And then she said: "He'd go to jail, wouldn't he? For quite a long time?"

"A year or two, perhaps. I could make it appear that he surrendered voluntarily, and thus lighten his sentence. He's bound there anyway, you know, and if he waits until the road is finished he'll get the maximum. I believe it's ten years on that charge." He shook up the lines. "But let's say no more about it."

She said no more about anything until they reached her home. There he declined to stay for supper, and was started away when she stopped him.

"When would you want me to go?" she asked, in a small and desolate voice.

CHAPTER XXVII

—AND SEE A CROOKED ROAD

BEYOND the new settlement of Mena Creek, Ann found the wagon road paralleling the first forty-five miles of main line track Craig had built, fallen into such neglect as to offer difficulties even to the horse she rode. It was a pleasant surprise, therefore, at the end of it to come out upon a new road, beaten broad and flat by the steady processional of supply wagons plodding north all summer from the railhead.

There too was the skeleton of a town; and in the next few miles she saw a dozen clearings. All were small and ragged: the homes of preëmptors—squatters on the even-numbered sections, not included in the prospective land grant.

Beyond was a wide, heavily timbered valley that was all untouched wilderness, except for the road and a grade line that came to an end a few miles farther on. For hours she rode through swamp and forest and occasional illogical patches of prairie, where she saw no one.

Here her mind staggered before a sudden awareness of what wilderness could mean; and the impression was only strengthened when at last she was out of the valley, and from the crest of a ridge defining its northern limits had a view of the track crawling down from the north.

The smoke from the work engine caught her attention first. Then she was able to make out the bell-stacked locomotive. She saw it advance to the end of the gossamer rails, and men, like so many mites, attack it, raiding its load of rail iron, carrying them to the track-laying crew, which placed, measured, and spiked them. Ahead of them moved wagons, distributing crossties; and farther on were the graders, fashioning a roadbed that looked for all the world like a long mole trail.

At the foot of the ridge, the road was blanketed with forest that shut off the view. She emerged not far from the track-laying crew, and at her approach every man of them stopped work to stare. She forced herself to ride on to a little man in lace boots and filthy jeans, who seemed in charge of the work.

"Where will I find Mr. Craig?" she asked.

In her embarrassment, she spoke with tremendous haut-

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eur, and he seemed quite crushed by it. He stammered: "Who, ma'am? Jeff Craig? Wal—he's likely to be most anywheres. Don't know but the best way to find him would be to go to camp and wait there till he shows up."

His eyes fell upon two or three back-strappers standing idle, gaping, and he burst into a sudden, profane tirade that sent them scurrying back to work and Ann scurrying away down the road to camp. There she asked again about Craig of a tow-headed boy carrying water to the cook tent, but she had to repeat the question twice before he comprehended it.

"Mr. Craig? Oh, Jeff?" he said, then. His eyes were fastened with a shocked surprise upon the trousers and boots under her riding skirt. "Yes'm, he's here. You wanta see him?"

"Yes," she said.

He set down his buckets and led her toward one of a number of small tents, set around the big sleeping tent. He pulled up its flap, said into it:

"Lady to see you, Jeff."

"WHAT? Don't be an idiot, Lunk," said Craig's voice impatiently. But then he caught a glimpse of Ann, dismounting, and sprang up so quickly that he spilled most of the papers spread over a small rough pine table before him.

"Oh, how do you do? Come in," he said. He pushed forward the canvas chair on which he had been sitting; said to the boy: "Tie back that flap, Lunk. And take care of Miss Wycliffe's horse."

The boy took his time about tying the flap, ogling Ann, until he caught Craig's scowl and retreated hastily. Craig looked out over the slashing, searchingly.

"You're alone?" he asked her.

"Yes," she said.

Now she was almost calm. Now watching him sit down on a corner of the bunk and fumble a pipe out of his shirt pocket and load it, then thrust it unlit back into the pocket, she realized with astonishment and satisfaction that he was much more flustered than she. That gave her confidence, and she said with as much authority as if they had been in her own drawing room:

"You may smoke if you like."

"Thank you," he said, though he grinned discreetly over the match he passed across the bowl of the pipe. But then he sobered, sat back, regarding her gravely.

"You shouldn't have come here alone," he said.

"I know it," she answered. "But I had to. Things were impossible at home; I had no one else to turn to . . ."

A hundred times on the journey here she had rehearsed those words, always with the despairing conviction that either she would be unable to speak them at all, or that she would do it so badly he would see through her.

But now she was amazed by her own instinctive skill in falsehood. She spoke in a low, distressed voice—even the little catch in it was perfectly calculated to arouse sympathy; and though her eyes were downcast, she was able to see through her lashes the effect she had on him.

She saw his hands tighten on the edge of the bunk until the backs of his fingers grew pale, his lean, burned face grow dark with emotion. She waited, expecting questions; but he only said in a taut, formal way:

"I'm sorry. I'll do anything I can for you, of course. But first—you must be starving. I'll get you something. Excuse me."

He rose and went out; relieved at being able to do something immediate and concrete for her. Left to herself, she was able for the first time that day to give some thought to her appearance.

She noticed a small mirror pinned to the canvas over a washbowl at the foot of the cot; and on rising to examine herself in it, she was horrified to see that her face was dirty. Even more shocking, however, was the lively shamelessness of the wide eyes that looked back at her. There was no question about it; she was enjoying this.

THE boy, Lunk, came in, bringing a small pail of hot water, a bucket of cold. He poured the hot water into the basin, meantime gawking so that he ran most of the water over onto the ground. In a few minutes he was back with some tin plates and cups and tableware, which he grouped around tin platters of cold meat on the table.

Craig followed, carrying her bedroll and saddlebags. He put them down on the cot, then began gathering up papers and clothing, all dirty, scattered carelessly about the tent.

"Moving in with Durstine," he explained gruffly.

She said, sincerely repentant: "I hadn't intended to drive you out of your own tent. I didn't want to be a nuisance, really."

"You're not —though you are a problem. But we'll talk about that later."

He went out, returning freshly shaven and wearing a coat and another, cleaner shirt. The boy, Lunk, brought in a huge pot of tea, a platter of hot bread cut in enormous wedges, and some giant cookies. She and Craig were just sitting down to the table when a red-faced man with a cook's apron around his expansive middle looked in.

"I don't have nothin' fit to cook with up here, lady," he said, with a wheezing, aggressive truculence. "The stove is cracked so it don't draw like it should, so you can't try pie, even when there's somethin' to fill 'em, which is seldom. It's even hard to keep in sugar an' lard; an' that's sourdough bread. If you don't like it, there's no law you got to eat it."

He withdrew with a final defiant wheeze, and Craig said, smiling: "He's nervous. He's afraid you'll complain."

"But it's good!" she protested, sampling the bread. "Everything is good. You know, I had thought when I started up here that I'd offer you my services as a cook, but I see now it wouldn't do. I couldn't make bread like this with a cracked stove, from sourdough."

"No, it wouldn't do," he agreed gravely.

The camp grew noisy, and through the doorway she could see men straggling up to the cook tent. Lunk, came for their dishes, and Craig looked at her inquiringly.

"If you're not too tired, you might like to walk?" he suggested. "There's a long twilight up here, and you can see something of the work we're doing."

"Of course." She rose readily, and they walked across the slashing, past the work engine, hissing softly, like a sleeper, to the track. The sun had disappeared, but its light lingered on the flat top of the ridge she had crossed that afternoon. A nip of frost was in the air.

For a while Craig talked of random, impersonal things. Then suddenly he said: "Now tell me why you left home."

THE question caught her by surprise. She was not merely unprepared to answer; she was unable to answer even when the lie she had composed returned to her startled mind. Treacherously, all her glibness had deserted her now when she needed it most. But he chose to put a kindly interpretation on her confusion.

"I know it's painful for you to speak of it. But I have to know, if I'm to help you. Is it Barstow?"

"Yes," she said. She spoke faintly, her voice catching; but she was not acting now. Every instinct revolted against the deception. "He—Mr. Barstow—has wanted me a long time. And my uncle— It was intolerable. I thought I could make myself useful here. I didn't realize—"

"I understand," he said gently. "And I'm glad you came to me. It means more to me than you know. Only you can't stay here. I've been trying to find a solution, and

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I've come to the conclusion that the best thing to do is to send you out to Mena Creek, to stay with one of the settlers until something better can be found for you."

Send her out? That would mean he did not intend to go along. She should have been alarmed at that, but instead she felt a treacherous relief. She had done everything that had been required of her; but now she was glad if she had failed.

The rails they had followed fell away; a few yards on, the even ranks of the crossties ended. They stopped, standing ankle deep in the loose earth of the new grade, facing the ridge. From here she could see how the grade and stake trail curved to conquer the ridge with a minimum of cut and fill. It had a look of inevitability, comprehended in a glance; but Craig said:

"We had more trouble in laying out this stretch than any other on the line. Originally we set our stakes three and a half miles east, through Loon Creek valley, but we were dissatisfied with that. It was almost six miles longer, and that meant more than that six miles of extra track would be required. It meant that every pound of freight, every passengers that came this way must go six miles further.

"We tried a hundred approaches to this ridge, and with each failure we told ourselves we were idiots to keep on trying. Finally Durstine and I got into an argument about it. He took the position that the attempt was an absurdity on the face of it, and in the process of proving that to me, on paper, he deduced this route."

She watched him as he talked. She saw how his eyes glowed, his face lighted with a fervor that seemed almost spiritual, and she said wonderingly: "You're proud of the work you're doing here, aren't you? It's everything you think about."

"Proud?" He swung on her, and she was amazed at the sudden harshness of his face and voice. "Quite the opposite. I'm sick with shame, whenever I permit myself to think of it impersonally. It's jerry-built on theft, deception, graft and treachery; there's not a mile of it laid as I'd like to lay it, with care and foresight, to serve forever. Come here, and I'll show you something."

CHAPTER XXVIII

ABLE DEBATER

HE LED her back to the row of crossties. "Look at these sleepers. Some of them—one in ten—are the kind I'd like to lay from end to end of this railroad. They're straight, sound as a silver dollar. But of the others, five are seconds, four are culls. The culls will last a year or two, the seconds three to ten years; but sooner or later all of them, culls and seconds, will have to be dug up and replaced at considerable expense and difficulty. It's not going to be pleasant for me to see that—men laboring for years to correct my mistakes."

"But why do you use such ties?" she asked. "All these forests—there must be more good ones in them than you could use."

"There are a thousand times more than I'd ever need. More than I'd need are burned in settlers' slashings every year. But I can't afford them. If I bought all first-grade ties, I'd have a beautiful pile of timber but nothing else."

He led her back a few steps further. "Now see these rails. I could be almost proud of them, if I hadn't stolen them. They're forty-pounders; twenty-five to fifty percent heavier than the average rail being laid today. But even so, they're not heavy enough. The loads that will go north and south over them when this country really opens up will pound them to pieces in a few years. I'll have the pleasure of seeing track crews, too, correcting my errors for a long time to come."

He swung back to the stake line. "Now that, you might say, is something I can be proud of: a location job that saves several miles and at the same time levels the grade profile. And I am. But I was able to change that location only because the inspection system at Madison has broken down. My friend, Mike Slane, wrecked it at my request."

"Do you mean to say the inspectors wouldn't have approved a change like that?" she asked, in amazement.

"Probably not. They'd already approved the Loon Creek route, and no inspector will ever admit he could be wrong. Of course with an organized inspection system in effect, I'd never have been fool enough to try to change it. Even if, by some miracle, the local inspectors had approved, I couldn't have made a move until it had run the gauntlet of all the numberless state and federal bureaus. The road would have bogged down here and never got finished."

HE KICKED savagely at the rails. "I'm not going to pretend that I had Mike Slane call off the inspectors only so that I could make this change in location. It's worse than that. I've talked slightingly of twenty- and thirty- and forty-pound rails; but across this ridge, over that big marsh you skirted, I'm going to have a wooden track."

"Wood? Wooden rails!" she said incredulously.

"That's right." His voice was defiant, but he kept kicking at the rail, like a shame-faced boy. "With all I've appropriated, I'm still short of iron, and there's not a man in the country that will sell me any more.

"I couldn't think of any way to close the gap until I heard about a road made out of wooden rails, reinforced on their upper surfaces by iron straps, that had been started west out of Kaukalin ten or twelve years ago. It was one of those grandiloquent projects intended to go clear through to the Pacific, that never got more than twenty miles from its starting point.

"I beat through the woods until I found that terminus of that road, and then tore up twelve miles of it, and hauled it over here. I've got backsmiths working on it now, repairing the iron reinforcement, and I hope it may last long enough to enable me to run an inspection train over it."

"But surely the railroad commissioners will see anything so flagrant as wooden rails!" she said.

"They will if they get to looking around. They'll see more than that. Bad joints, loose rails, because I haven't enough spikes and bolts, and can't buy any more; perhaps rails laid bare across that marsh, because I may not have time to complete all the roadbed. I'm hoping for a hard winter."

"Why?"

"So that the marsh will freeze solidly enough to let me get a train across. And I hope cold enough to keep the commission from poking around too much, seeing things they shouldn't. That's all that can save me."

Ann said, with measured contempt: "I don't wonder that you're ashamed of the work you're doing. A road so poor that no inspector who had a look at it would approve it is bad enough. But when I think of all the people you've cheated to build it—"

"It isn't just Stevenson or the eastern investors, who gave you money. They can afford to lose something, I suppose. But all these mortgagors, who stand to lose their farms and homes through you; thousands of them and their families—"

He was looking at her in such honest wonder that she faltered, stopped. He said, amazed: "So you still think that. You still believe I'm the one that's cheating them!"

She had made a mistake, she saw; she had forgotten her role. But when he resumed, he spoke more gently: "I

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suppose it's hard for you to realize the truth, even now—to see that it is not I that's robbing them, but your uncle and Barstow and Granville. But surely you must have some reason to doubt them, or you wouldn't be here."

She could say nothing. She hardly knew what to think. He believed what he was saying. Her intuition told her that, and it was of far greater importance than anything he said.

HE WENT on, explaining, justifying her: "I was wrong, I supose, in pointing out all the faults in my railroad first. It's natural for you to presume that if I'd cheat inspectors and men like Barstow and Stevenson, I'd cheat everyone else.

"It's harder to make my attitude clear because I can't even claim that I differentiate between the honest and dishonest. Inspectors as a rule aren't dishonest, though petty and stupid. Stevenson isn't, according to his own lights.

"No; the measuring stick for conduct, with me, is something quite different. The only question I ask of myself is whether what I am about to do will help to get my road built. Perhaps you can understand that?"

"I could understand it, if it were a good railroad. But is it worth while to build a bad one, full of errors, that will take years of labor to correct?"

"I believe so," he said. "A few years ago, I'd have made a quite different answer. When I was in college, even when I was on reconnaissance in the West, I'd have said it was never worth while to build a bad road. Later, though, when I got at real building jobs—But this is likely to be a long story. Let's sit down."

A pile of ties stood nearby, and they perched themselves on its flat top. The glow, by now, had faded from the sky, and some stars stood out in it above the top of the graying ridge. Ann said, with entire irrelevance: "I wonder what you were like in college."

"Pretty silly I'm afraid. The West did something toward curing me, and a year or two on construction work finished the job. I learned a lot more than how things were done. I learned why they had to be done that way."

He said: "A railroad is a common enterprise, in the sense that it benefits everybody it touches, however remotely. And it seems reasonable, doesn't it, that it should be built by common effort—by all the people, working together?"

"I've always thought that," she said. "My father did, and Mr. Barstow is always saying the same thing."

"I said so too, and so did everyone else at the dawn of the railroad era. They started building that way, but somehow it never worked out. An example is a section of what is now the Pennsylvania railroad, running over the Alleghanies. That piece of road was built coöperatively, and everybody was to have free access to it, like a highway.

"The result was pretty bad. A steam-drawn passenger train might have to idle along hours behind one old flat car hauled by horses. The road belonged as much to the man with horses as to the man with steam power.

"That's an obvious example; but in financing even more conventional roads common effort produced nothing but a hysteria of enthusiasm that soon bogged down in a welter of indifference, quarreling, corruption. Sooner or later all of them had to be turned over to individuals, who had to see the job through or lose everything they'd invested."

"I CAN'T see that individuals do much better," she said hotly. "There is plenty of quarreling and corruption among them too."

"I know. But the important point is, that they are getting roads built. The only fair test of any method is its results, though it took me a long time to see that. A man has to learn to accept his world as he finds it."

"He can change it, too," she argued rebelliously.

"Of course he can. And he does, through the things he makes. Forty years from now, at the turn of this century, this will be an entirely different kind of country. It will be all one country: not East and West, North and South. The railroads we're building, these makeshift, blundering railroads, will have done their part in binding it together.

"There will be more and bigger machines and people won't have to work so hard. They'll have more time for thinking; perhaps even some time to think back on us and try to judge us, balancing the good we did against the evil, to see whether we justified ourselves.

"The only danger is that they may do too much thinking. Their thought may get too involved; they may get too far away from the black-and-white kind of thinking that gets things done."

"What do you mean by black-and-white thinking?" she asked.

"I mean simple, not ornate thinking. A fine example of the black-and-white thinker is my friend, Mike Slane. In Indian country, Mike was invaluable to us because he thought about Indians with such beautiful simplicity. He held that the only good Injun was a dead Injun."

"Oh, that's horrible," she said. "It's cruel, unfair."

"Perhaps. But it got results. Mike's forebears had the same way of thinking about those Hessians, imported to fight them in the Revolutionary war, because English peoples never have liked to war on each other. His forebears used to say that the only good German was a dead German. That got results, too. I've been learning to think in blacks and whites myself, of late years. To me the only good railroad is one that gets built; the only bad one a road that doesn't."

"So your railroad will be a good one, if only it gets through? Even laid bare across a marsh, on cull ties and stolen iron and wooden rails!"

"Yes, it will," he said, with complete conviction. "The little dot of wealth I borrowed—or stole, if you insist—is nothing in comparison with the wealth it will create. Within twenty years this road will have brought hundreds of thousands of farmers, lumbermen, miners, shopkeepers into this wilderness. It will have built scores of new towns, cleared millions of acres of land, logged ten thousand square miles of pine timber

"Even the people it's pinching now, these men and women who mortgaged their lands and homes for it, will be repaid many times over, even though indirectly. Yes; dishonest as it was in conception, far as it is from perfection, it will be a good road—if it goes through."

"You're a very able debater," she said. "First you convince me the road is worthless. Now you almost have me convinced that it's a boon to mankind."

He did not smile. He said gravely: "I'm giving you both sides for a very particular reason. I want you to understand what I'm doing because, you see I want you to marry me."

CHAPTER XXIX

THIS IS THE WAY OUT

HE SPOKE so quietly she had difficulty in believing she had heard him correctly. She said, "What?" incredulously.

"I want you to marry me. I am very much in love with you. I have been for a long time. Ever since we danced, I know; perhaps even before. But until you came here, I had thought I wouldn't mention it."

"Why not?" she said.

His casualnes was infectious. She spoke as casually. He said: "Because I'm going to be arrested and sent to jail

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when this job is finished. And ordinarily, I couldn't ask you to share that disgrace with me."

"But now you feel I've disgraced myself enough by coming to you so that it wouldn't matter. Is that it?"

"I'd not say that either of us is disgraced," he said evenly. "I did what I had to to get my road built; you came because there was nothing else you could do. That simplifies things. It leaves us no alternative.

"I'll take you to Mena Creek tomorrow, and we can be married there. It's almost necessary, you know, if I'm to lodge you with decent people. Afterward you'll have time to decide whether you want to make a real marriage of it. If not, my going to jail would give you grounds for ending it."

Still he was casual, impersonal as if he were talking about rails or sleepers. But then he looked at her, and she saw his face. His eyes had a desperate importunity, and the muscles about his mouth were quivering. Suddenly, with a fond, healing impulse she put first her hands on them, and then her mouth.

"Yes. Oh yes," she said, with a complete lack of logic, that was nevertheless entirely coherent to him.

BUT THEN, back in the tent he had surrendered to her, recollection came with such stinging clarity that she sat upright on her cot with the intention of going at once to him to tell him why she had come. Only the thought that he would not be alone restrained her.

She would have to tell him, she knew. It would be unpleasant, and it would involve a drastic change in arrangements, but there was no other way.

She lay back on the lumpy straw pallet, but she could not sleep. Every nerve in her was impatient for morning; and so it was that some time in the blackest hours of the night, she heard the approach of a hurrying horse.

A man's voice—the camp watchman's—was lifted in sharp challenge. The rider answered at some length, then came on, passing her tent to stop before that occupied by Craig and Durstine. He spoke Craig's name, had an instant answer, and she was sure then that she recognized the voice of the newcomer as Mike Slane's.

She heard Slane dismounting, apparently going into the tent. His voice and Craig's dwindled, and she drowsed a little, rousing to the clamor of an awakening camp. The green light of morning was filtering through the tent canvas, though dawn had not yet come.

She washed in cold water from the bucket, and dressed, and waited for Craig; but an hour passed and the camp had quieted before he arrived. She had a gay greeting ready for him, but it died on her lips as she looked into his face. It was stern and rigid, and his eyes had a remote, unfriendly look.

"Good morning," he said curtly, from the entrance. "If you don't mind, we'll have breakfast at the main tent."

She followed him to the big cook tent, so bewildered by the change in him that she could find nothing to say. Mike Slane was there before them, seated at one of the two big board tables running the length of the tent. He was dusty, bedraggled-looking; he acknowledged her appearance by taking off his hat, but his one good eye regarded her without enthusiasm and without warmth.

The boy, Lunk, brought beans, tea, a platter of hoe cakes that he repeatedly replenished as Slane repeatedly stripped it bare. Neither Ann nor Craig ate much or said anything until Slane had finished and leaned back with a sigh of gusty satisfaction. Then Craig stirred, looked at her:

"We're leaving for Mena Creek immediately. I'm having your horse saddled, your bags packed. You're ready?"

"No," she said. She had made up her mind, during the meal. She would refuse to leave, but she would not tell him why; not now, in the face of his new, puzzling unfriendliness. "I'm not going. Not today."

"Why not?" he said.

HE WAS looking at her very intently. Mike Slane, too, had lifted his head to stare at her. She said haltingly: "I couldn't stand another long ride today. Yesterday stiffened me."

"Is that the only reason?"

"No," she said. "I can leave by myself, if you insist, and go back to Lakehead. But I don't want you to come."

"Why?"

A light had leaped up into his eyes, softening them, relaxing the stern lines of his face. But Mike Slane interposed warningly:

"Jeff, she was awake last night, when I came in. I heard somebody stirrin' on that cot, though then I didn't know it was her. She could've heard every word I said."

"Is that right?" Craig asked of her.

"I heard him come in. I wasn't asleep, then or for a long time afterward. But I heard nothing that was said. Why do you ask?"

"Because it was an important conversation. Mike told me several interesting things. One of the most interesting was that Barstow and five men were at Mena Creek when he came through yesterday evening—camped there, waiting for someone or something. In view of the fact that you and I were to go there, it occurred to me that it might be us they were waiting for. Is that right?"

"Yes," she said. She saw his face grow hard and bleak again, and she cried passionately: "I was going to tell you. Last night changed everything. But I couldn't, this morning. You didn't give me a chance."

"You'd have been much more convincing if you had told me last night." He rose, with a forced, bitter smile. "I'll have to insist that you ride out with us today. I think you'll find that your saddle-soreness will disappear with a little riding."

"But you're not going down there now?" she protested.

"Yes," he said grimly. "You see, I'm taking five men too; and if all goes well, we, not he, will have the advantage of surprise."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

THE QUEST OF TARZAN

By Edgar Rice Burroughs

Beginning in the August 23rd Argosy

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But Our Hero Was Not Dead

By Manly Wade Wellman

The gaunt old gentleman seized the receiver with surprising speed

In England now there is an old and very famous gentleman who has never lived and will never die. This story is a moment of his greatness

OUT of the black sky plummeted Boling, toward the black earth. He knew nothing of the ground toward which he fell, save that it was five miles inland from the Sussex coast and, according to Dr. Goebbels' best information, sparsely settled.

The night air hummed in his parachute rigging, and he seemed to drop faster than ten feet a second, but to think of that was unworthy of a trusted agent of the German Intelligence. Though the pilot above had not dared drop him a light, Boling could land without much mishap. . . Even as he told himself that, land he did. He struck heavily on hands and knees, and around him settled the limp folds of the parachute.

At once he threw off the harness, wadded the fabric and thrust it out of sight between a boulder and a bush. Standing up, he took stock of himself. The left leg of his trousers was torn, and the knee skinned—that was all. He remembered that William the Conquerer had also gone sprawling when he landed at Hastings, not so far from here. The omen was good. Boling stooped, like Duke William, and clutched a handful of pebbles.

"Thus do I seize the land!" he quoted aloud, for he was at heart theatrical.

His name was not really Boling, though he had prospered under that and other aliases. Nor, though he wore the uniform of a British private, was he British. Born in Chicago late in 1917, of unsavory parents, he had matured to a notable career of imposture and theft. He had entered the employment of the Third Reich, not for love of its cause or thirst for adventure, but for the very high rate of pay. Boling was practical as well as gifted. He had gladly accepted the present difficult and dangerous mission, which might well be the making of his fortune.

Now the early gray dawn came and peered over his shoulder. Boling saw that he was on a grassy slope, with an ill-used gravel road below it. Just across that road showed lighted windows—a house with early risers. He walked toward those lights.

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Which way was Eastburne, was his first problem. He had never seen the town; he had only the name and telephone number there of one Philip Davis who, if addressed by him as "uncle", would know that the time had arrived to muster fifteen others.

They, in turn, would gather waiting comrades from the surrounding community, picked, hard men who whole years ago had taken lodging and stored arms thereabouts. These would organize and operate as a crack infantry battalion. After that, the well tested routine that had helped to conquer Norway, Holland, Belgium, France—seizure of communications, blowing up of rails and roads, capture of airdromes.

Reenforcements would drop in parachutes from overhead, as he, Boling, had done. At dusk this would be done. In the night, Eastbourne would be firmly held, with a picked invasion corps landing from barges.

Crossing the road toward the house, Boling considered the matter as good as accomplished. He needed only a word from the house-dwellers to set him on his way.

HE found the opening in the chin-high hedge of brambles and flowering bushes, and in the strengthening light he trod warily up the flagged path. The house, now visible, was only a one-story cottage of white plaster, with a roof of dark tiling. Gaining the doorstep, Boling swung the tarnished knocker against the stout oak panel.

Silence. Then heavy steps and a mumbling voice. The door creaked open. A woman in shawl and cap, plump and very old—past ninety, it seemed to Boling—put out a face like a cheerful walnut.

"Good morning," she said. "Yes, who is that?" Her ancient eyes blinked behind small, thick lenses like bottle-bottoms. "Soldier, ain't you?"

"Right you are," he responded in his most English manner, smiling to charm her. This crone had a London accent, and looked simple and good-humored. "I'm tramping down to Eastbourne to visit my uncle," he went on plausibly, "and lost my way on the downs in the dark. Can you direct me on?"

Before the old woman could reply, a dry voice had spoken from behind her: "Ask the young man to step inside, Mrs. Hudson."

The old woman drew the door more widely open. Boling entered one of those living rooms that have survived their era. In the light of a hanging oil lamp he could see walls papered in blue with yellow flowers, above gray-painted wainscoting. On a center table lay some old books, guarded by a pudgy china dog. At the rear, next a dark inner doorway, blazed a small but cheerful fire, and from a chair beside it rose the man who had spoken.

"If you have walked all night, you will be tired," he said to Boling. "Stop and rest. We're about to have some tea. Won't you join us?"

"Thank you, sir," accepted Boling heartily. This was another Londoner, very tall and as gaunt as a musket. He could not be many years younger than the woman called Mrs. Hudson, but he still had vigor and presence.

He stood quite straight in his shabbiest of blue dressing gowns. The lamplight revealed a long hooked nose and a long lean chin, with bright eyes of blue under a thatch of thistledown hair. Boling thought of Dr. Punch grown old, dignified and courteous. The right hand seemed loosely clenched inside a pocket of the dressing gown. The left, lean and fine, held a blackened old briar with a curved stem.

"I see," said this old gentleman, his eyes studying Boling's insignia, "that you're a Fusilier—Northumberland."

"Yes, sir, Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers," rejoined Boling, who had naturally chosen for his disguise the badges of a regiment lying far from Sussex. "As I told your good housekeeper, I'm going to Eastbourne. If you can direct me, or let me use your telephone—"

"I am sorry, we have no telephone," the other informed him.

Mrs. Hudson gulped and goggled at that, but the old blue eyes barely flickered a message at her. Again the gaunt old man spoke: "There is a telephone, however, in the house just behind us — the house of Constable Timmons."

Boling had no taste for visiting a policeman, especially an officious country one, and so he avoided comment on the last sugestion. Instead he thanked his host for the invitation to refreshment. The old woman brought in a tray with dishes and a steaming kettle, and a moment later they were joined by another ancient man.

This one was plump and tweedy, with a drooping gray moustache and wide eyes full of childish innocence. Boling set him down as a doctor, and felt a glow of pride in his own acumen when the newcomer was so introduced. So pleased was Boling with himself, indeed, that he did not bother to catch the doctor's surname.

"This young man is of your old regiment, I think," the lean man informed the fat one. "Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers."

"Oh, really? Quite so, quite so," chirruped the doctor, in a katydid fashion that impelled Boling to classify him as a simpleton. "Quite. I was with the old Fifth—but that would be well before your time, young man. I served in the Afghan War." This last with a proud protruding of the big eyes. For a moment Boling dreaded a torrent of reminiscence; but the Punchfaced man had just finished relighting his curved briar, and now called attention to the tea which Mrs. Hudson was pouring.

"MURDERER'S LAST SMOKE"

The Highly Dramatic Story of a Killer's Bluff by

JOEL TOWNSLEY ROGERS

"TAPS AT ELEVEN"

by ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

Don't Fail to Read These Stirring Stories in

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

IN THE AUGUST 2nd ISSUE — ON SALE JULY 23rd

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THE three men sipped gratefully. Boling permitted himself a moment of ironic meditation on how snug it was, so shortly before bombs and bayonets would engulf this and all other houses in the neighborhood of Eastbourne.

Mrs. Hudson waddled to his elbow with toasted muffins. 'Poor lad," she said maternally, "you've torn them lovely trousers."

From the other side of the fire bright blue eyes gazed through the smoke of strong shag. "Oh, yes," said the dry voice, "you walked over the downs at night, I think I heard you say when you came. And you fell?"

"Yes, sir," replied Boling, and thrust his skinned knee into view through the rip. "No great injury, however, except to my uniform. The King will give me a new one, what?"

"I daresay," agreed the doctor, lifting his mustache from his teacup. "Nothing too good for the old regiment."

That led to discussion of the glorious past of the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers, and the probable triumphant future. Boling made the most guarded of statements, lest the pudgy old veteran find something of which to be suspicious; but, to bolster his pose, he fished forth a wad of painstakingly forged papers—pay-book, billet assignment, pass through lines, and so on. The gaunt man in blue studied them with polite interest.

"And now," said the doctor, "how is my old friend Major Amidon?"

"Major Amidon?" repeated Boling to gain time, and glanced as sharply as he dared at his interrogator. Such a question might well be a trap, simple and dangerous, the more so because his research concerning the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers had not supplied him with any such name among the officers.

But then he took stock once more of that plump, mild, guileless face. Boling, cunning and criminal, knew a man incapable of lying or deception when he saw one. The doctor was setting no trap whatever; in fact, his next words provided a valuable cue to take up.

"Yes, of course—he must be acting chief of brigade by now. Tall, red-faced, monocle—"

"Oh, Major Amidon!" cried Boling, as if remembering. "I know him only by sight, naturally. As you say, he's acting chief of battalion; probably he'll get a promotion soon. He's quite well, and very much liked by the men."

The thin old man passed back Boling's papers and inquired courteously after the uncle in Eastbourne. Boling readily named Philip Davis, who would have been at pains to make for himself a good reputation. It developed that both of Boling's entertainers knew Mr. Davis slightly—proprietor of the Royal Oak, a fine old public house. Public houses, amplified the doctor, weren't what they had been in the 'eighties, but the Royal Oak was a happy survival from that golden age. And so on.

With relish Boling drained his last drop to tea, ate his last crumb of muffin. His eyes roamed about the room, which he already regarded as an ideal headquarters. Even his momentary nervousness about the constable in the house behind had left him. He reflected that the very closeness of an official would eliminate any prying or searching by the enemy. He'd get on to Eastbourne, have Davis set the machinery going, and then pop back here to wait in comfort for the ripe moment when, the chief dangers of conquest gone by, he could step forth. . . .

He rose with actual regret that he must get about his business. "I thank you all so much," he said. "And now it's quite light—I really must be on my way."

"Private Boling," said the old man with the blue gown, "before you go, I have a confession to make."

"Confession?" spluttered the doctor, and Mrs. Hudson stared in amazement.

"Exactly." Two fine, gaunt old hands rose and placed their fingertips together. "When you came here I couldn't be sure about you, things being as they are these days."

"Quite so, quite so," interjected the doctor. "Alien enemies and all that. You understand, young man."

"Of course," Boling smiled winningly.

"And so," continued his host, "I was guilty of a lie. But now that I've had a look at you, I am sure of what you are. And let me say that I do have a telephone, after all. You are quite free to use it. Through the door there."

Boling felt his heart warm with self-satisfaction. He had always considered himself a prince of deceivers, this admission on the part of the scrawny dotard was altogether pleasant. Thankfully he entered a dark little hallway from the wall of which sprouted the telephone. He lifted the receiver and called the number he had memorized.

"Hello," he greeted the man who made guarded answer. "Is that Mr. Philip Davis? . . . Your nephew, Amos Boling, here. I'm coming to town at once. I'll meet you and the others wherever you say . . . What's the name of your pub again? . . . The Royal Oak? Very good, we'll meet there at nine o'clock."

"That will do," said the dry voice of his host behind his very shoulder. "Hang up, Mr. Boling. At once."

BOLING spun around, his heart somersaulting with sudden terror. The gaunt figure stepped back very smoothly and rapidly for so aged a man. The right hand dropped again into the pocket of the old blue dressing gown. It brought out a small, broad-muzzled pistol, which the man held leveled at Boland's belly.

"I asked you to telephone, Mr. Boling, in hopes that you would somehow reveal your fellow-agents. We know that they'll be at the Royal Oak at nine. A party of police will appear to take them in charge. As for you—Mrs. Hudson, please step across the back yard and ask Constable Timmons to come at once."

Boling glared. His right hand moved, as stealthily as a snake, toward his hip.

"None of that," barked the doctor from the other side of the sitting room. He, too, was on his feet, jerking open a drawer in the center table. From it he took a big service revolver, of antiquated make but uncommonly well kept. The plump old hand hefted the weapon knowingly. "Lift your arms, sir, and at once."

Fuming, Boling obeyed. The blue dressing gown glided toward him, the left hand snatched away the flat automatic in his hip pocket.

"I observed that bulge in your otherwise neat uniform," commented the lean old man, "and pondered that pocket-pistols are not regulation for infantry privates. It was one of several inconsistencies that branded you as an enemy agent. Will you take the armchair, Mr. Boling? I will explain."

There was nothing to do, under the muzzles of those guns, but to sit and listen.

"The apparition of a British soldier trying hard to disguise an American accent intrigued me, but did not condemn you at first. However, the knee of your trousers—I always look first at the trouser-knee of a stranger—was so violently torn as to suggest a heavy fall somewhere. The rest of your kit was disarranged as well. But your boots—I always look at boots second—were innocent of scuff or even much wear. I knew at once that your story of a long night's tramp, with trippings and tumblings, was a lie."

Boling summoned all his assurance. "See here," he cried harshly, "I don't mind a little joke or whatever, but this has gone far enough. I'm a soldier and as such a defender of the realm. If you offer me violence—"

"There will be no violence unless you bring it on yourself. Suffer me to continue: You caused me even more suspicion when, calling yourself a private of the Fifth

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Northumberland Fusiliers, you yet patently failed to recognize the name of my old friend here. He, too, was of the Fifth, and in civilian life has won such fame as few Fusiliers can boast. The whole world reads his writings—"

"Please, please," murmured the doctor gently.

"I do not seek to embarrass you, my dear fellow," assured the lean host, "only to taunt this sorry deceiver with his own clumsiness. After that, Mr. Boling, your anxiety to show your credentials to me, who had not asked for them and had no authority to examine them; your talk about the service, plainly committed to memory from a book; and, finally, your glib talk about one Major Amidon who does not exist—these were sufficient proof."

"Does not exist?" almost barked the doctor. "What do you mean? Of course Major Amidon exists. He and I served together—"

Then he broke off abruptly, and his eyes bulged foolishly. He coughed and snickered in embarrassed apology.

"Dear me, now I know that I'm doddering," he said more gently. "You're right, my dear fellow — Major Amidon exists no longer. He retired in 1910, and you yourself pointed out his death notice to me five years ago. Odd how old memories cling on and deceive us—good psychological point there somewhere . . ."

His voice trailed off, and his comrade triumphantly resumed the indictment of Boling:

"My mind returned to the problem of your disordered kit and well-kept shoes. By deductive reasoning I considered and eliminated one possibility after another. It was increasingly plain that you had fallen from a height, but had not walked far to get here. Had you traveled in a motor? But this is the only road hereabouts, and a bad one, running to a dead end two miles up the downs. We have been awake for hours, and would have heard a machine. A horse, then? Possible, even in these mechanized times, but your trousers bear no trace of sitting astride a saddle. Bicycle? But you would have worn a clip on the ankle next the sprocket, and that clip would have creased your trouser-cuff. What does this leave?"

"What?" asked the fat doctor, as eagerly as a child hearing a story.

"What, indeed, but an airplane and a parachute? And what does a parachute signify in these days but German invasion—which has come to our humble door in the presence of Mr. Boling?" The white head bowed, like an actor's taking a curtain call, then turned toward the front door. "Ah, here returns Mrs. Hudson, with Constable Timmons. Constable, we have a German spy for you to take in charge."

Boling came to his feet, almost ready to brave the two pistols that covered him. "You're a devil!" he raged at his discoverer.

The blue eyes twinkled. "Not at all. I am an old man who has retained the use of his brains, even after long and restful idleness."

The sturdy constable approached Boling, a pair of gleaming manacles in his hands. "Will you come along quietly?" he asked formally, and Boling held out his wrists. He was beaten.

The old doctor dropped his revolver back into its drawer, and tramped across to his friend.

"Amazing!" he almost bellowed. "I thought I was past wondering at you, but—amazing, that's all I can say!"

A blue-sleeved arm lifted, the fine lean hand patted the doctor's tweed shoulder affectionately. And even before the words were spoken, as they must have been spoken so often in past years, Boling suddenly knew what they would be:

"Elementary, my dear Watson," said old Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

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Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

YOU remember that the Leader's high-powered radio station figured importantly in Charles Marquis Warren's "Forward into Battle." Well, our attention has been called to a couple of news stories from Mexico which seem to indicate that Mr. Warren is something of a prophet.

One release announced that Mexican troops had confiscated station XERA, just across the Border. XERA, the third most powerful station in the world, had been broadcasting messages in code, which aroused suspicion both in Mexico and the United States. The second newspaper report was even more definite: Mexican agents seized a clandestine transmitting and receiving station in the heart of Mexico City; and while the government made no official statement, the agents participating in the raid were reported to have claimed that the short-wave station had been used for pro-Nazi broadcasts.

So there you are. When a writer has as vivid and logical an imagination as Mr. Warren's, he can often put his finger on an event that is yet to come. Read the papers for yesterday's news; read ARGOSY for tomorrow's. But let us sincerely hope that the main course of "Forward into Battle" does not become actuality. We have Mr. Warren's personal assurance that it will not, and he should know.

We might as well stay on the subject of Warren. A while ago he was criticized in Argonotes by a Mr. Evans, and now we have indignant responses from two readers. First

LINN LAMBERT

After reading the second installment of "Forward into Battle" in the current issue of *Argosy,* I am writing my first fan letter.

As a reader of *Argosy* for many years, I am aware of how many of our famous writers received their encouragement and first success in your magazine. In my opinion, Mr. Warren's story certainly compares very favorably with Ernest Hemingway. I know nothing of the backgrounds of these two gentlemen, and perhaps Mr. Warren will not consider the comparison a compliment. But I should like to predict that if Mr. Warren can maintain his present style, he will head the best-seller list before very long.

Probably your letter running this week in Argonotes gave me the necessary impetus to write this letter. The one from G. Evans in criticism of Mr. Warren. . . . I honestly feel that such readers as this are out of their class in reading *Argosy,* for Mr. Warren is undoubtedly an educated man, and this reader apparently should be reading the juvenile comic books he mentions.
Los Angeles, Calif.

WE ARE quite certain that Mr. Warren will be highly pleased to be compared with Hemingway. He will be pleased, too, with the orchids showered over him by our second correspondent.

JOHN REAMS

I have had a swell year reading C. M. Warren. So have my friends, and I'm sure a lot of other people have too. Right now I'm in the middle of "Forward into Battle" and liking it to beat hell.

I'm telling you this just in case you paid too much attention to G. Evans' letter in the June 14 issue. How he has the nerve to consider himself a story critic when he hasn't got the nerve to carry an *Argosy* down the street, is more than I can understand. And if he hears bells every time he reads Arthur or Myers—well, he's the one to hear the ringing in his head all the time, and it's a free world.

A long time ago I asked you for more Warren and I'm not regretting it for a minute. He's versatile and consistent and good—and that's what I want for my reading department.
Tucson, Arizona.

WE TURN now to a reader who has nothing but praise for ARGOSY. He is kind enough to offer aid to a fellow Argonaut in search of Peter the Brazen.

CHARLES E. SOUTHERN

Answering the request of Mr. Ralph M. Hilton's letter in Argonotes for the ARGOSY of June 14, in which he requests information concerning the "Peter The Brazen" stories, as to whether they have ever been published in book form; please advise Mr. Hilton that only one story of this series was ever pubished in book form, under the title *Peter the Brazen* by George F. Worts (which is Loring Brent's real name.)

I purchased a copy of this book some years ago from Wanamaker's in Philadelphia; since that time it has gotten away from me and so cannot tell him just who the publisher was. If it will aid Mr. Hilton any I am in Philadelphia quite frequently and will inquire for him at Wanamaker's or Leary's Old Book Store and see if I can pick up a copy for him. I would also like to get another one for myself. Might I also suggest that Mr. Hilton get in touch with A. L. Burt & Co. or Grossett & Dunlap; they may have this in their reprints. If I can be of any aid to Mr. Hilton as a fellow ARGOSY fan, will be glad to help him out.

Incidentally while I am at it, wish to congratulate Mr. Roscoe on his story "Shake Hands with Old Hickory." The old saying that Truth Is Stranger Than Fiction certainly applies, or should I say Truth is better than fiction. Whether this story is legend or fact, it it sure is a real honest American yarn —and in my opinion it's a literary masterpiece. Mr. Roscoe should be proud of it.

"Hang Him High" and "Murder Goes To Sea" were also good. In fact I haven't read a punk story in the ARGOSY since 1916 and that's saying a lot. I see some of the college professors are still kicking technically—so what! Anyhow the ARGOSY suits me fine just the way she is, cover and all.
Wilmington, Del.

MR. REAMS, meet Mr. Southern. We're grateful for this letter; always glad to get help from our readers.

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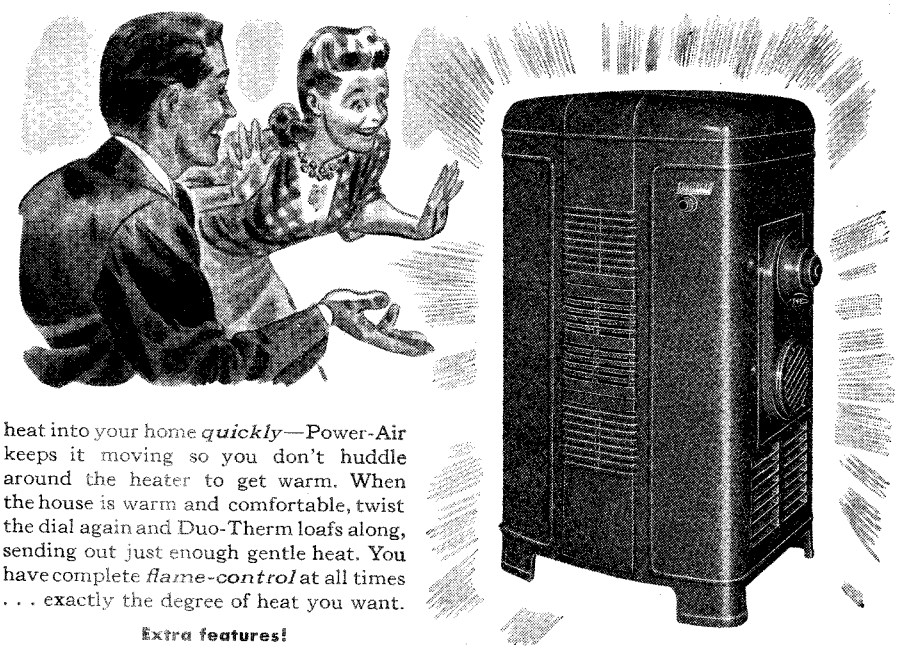

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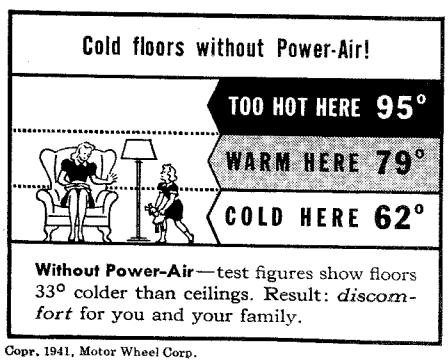

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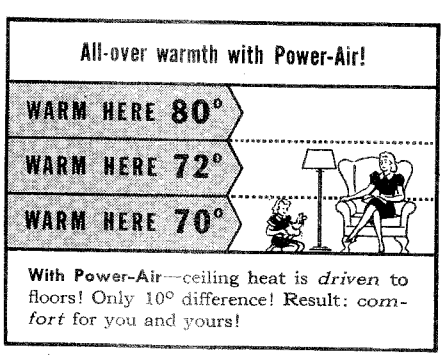

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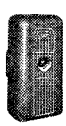

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